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IN THIS ISSUE

THE GOD IN THE BOWL
BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

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AN EDITORIAL ON

TELEPATHY

One af the favarite themes af science fictian has alwoys been telepothy. The reason far that should be abvious; outhars *hod* to use telepathy. Whenever men met on olien life or civilizatian, the only means of communicotion that wauldn't take months of hord labor was by giving the aliens the power ta read minds. Anyane wha hos spent the effart needed ta learn anather language con appreciote this.

Fartunotely, the ESP wark being dane at Duke University came alang ta give o vogue bosis for the ossumptian, ond clothed it all with o semblonce of scientific passibility. It wouldn't have mottered, though; repeoted use of the power in fiction noturolly led to reoder occeptance. We take aur space ships and aur telepathy for gronted.

Moybe we take it taa much far granted. There have been a few excellent stories which went a little deeper inta the problem af estabishing cammunicotion between alien thought potterns. A rore story will also oppear which gaes into some af the prablems af telepathy amang people on Earth. But the surfoce hos only been scrotched.

What will happen ta the marals ond the ethics af a saciety in which telepothy warks? The Kinsey repart which has been published ond the ane obaut due both indicate the wide dispority between the theory ond practice of aur marol structure. This would certoinly break dawn befare the impoct af mind reading; when men can na langer canceal their thoughts, they will either have ta change their canduct ta what is acceptoble ar change what is acceptable ta conform to the focts. There con be little question os to which alternate will be chosen!

Whot will happen to some of aur so-called bosic instincts? The whale game of caurtship depends an arausing the ather by suggestion, holfpramises, caquetry ond illusion. When a man and waman knaw just exactly what is going on between them ond whot each hos in mind, the basis of half our literature is going ta became absurd. The family-life

basis of society will either come to a grinding halt, or it will assume a stability and reality now unknown; people will get married, if at all, only because they know each other. Children will know whether they are wanted or not, and the basic insecurities behind many neuroses will disappear, perhaps.

Business will have some odd reactions, to say the least. So will all facets of daily life. Ethics will become necessary, of course, but we don't really know what is ethical, yet, because each of us can see no further than our own mind will permit. What becomes of the domineering mother, the man making a secret killing in the market, or the artists and writers who know what others think of their work?

Politics will obviously change. How many men today could stand the test of their real motivation being known? But let's not be too hasty. After all, nobody is perfect, and a race of telepaths would know that those nasty thoughts were so normal that they wouldn't use the term "nasty" anymore—we hope. Science would be out in the open; it would have the free exchange of ideas it wants. It would also exist in circumstances where real coordination between the specialized sciences would be inevitable. Psychology might become a real science; at present, analysis is only a clumsy means of trying to get behind the mental barriers that would no longer exist for a true telepath.

Or, what would happen to man's relations with the other animals? Would we still go hunting? How would we get along with our domestic dogs and cats? They have definite thoughts, however rudimentary. The level of thinking in a common alley cat might surprise men—and the cat's reaction to man might give a better basis for determining the realities of ethics, character and general behavior than even the closest human-to-human relationship. Yet this facet of telepathy seems to have been completely neglected.

Take a novel which is generally recognized as a classic. Now assume telepathy, and go through it, paragraph by paragraph, asking yourself what would be valid. Try to imagine what would change. Extend the situations there into a world where thoughts were common property. It's one of the best eye-openers possible, and a game that will afford you hours of amusement, if you'll try it.

You'll also see that science fiction doesn't need any new ideas. There is plenty of meat on the old bones still. A thousand stories can be written with the single assumption of the "overworked" theme of telepathy, and they can be sounder, deeper stories than any yet produced.

Maybe we should all stop racing madly through the universe and do a little deeper digging right here on our own world. Maybe we should stop taking things for granted. What do *you* think?

LESTER DEL REY


ORBAN

MOON-BLIND

BY ERIK VAN LHIN

Either Soames or all of Earth was crazy. He knew he'd landed on the Moon in 1948. They knew no ship had left Earth and that he had died in World War II. And all the proof was on their side.

Illustrated by ORBAN

After four years, the clouds looked good. From up there, they had been blurs on the white and green ball that hung in the sky to mock him. Now, as they seemed to rush up towards him they spelled home—or death. There were worse things than death.

For the moment, the sight of the Earth swelling below him brought a lump in Bill Soames' throat. He'd hated it, cursed it, and screamed at it during the long Lunar days. He'd loathed the smug fools on it who had deserted him after calling him a hero and had left him to die

or get back by himself. But now the call of his kind washed all that out. A thousand miles below were people, life, and home. It didn't matter what they'd done to him, or why they had done it; he'd lived through it somehow, and now he was almost there.

He shivered in the wash of emotions. His gaunt, almost skeletal body jerked under the flood of adrenalin, and his scarred, claw-like hands gripped the edge of the control board savagely. The starved hollows in his cheeks deepened, and the wisps of white hair on his head were beaded with drops of cold perspiration.

Behind him, the uneven roar of the rocket had been making the little ship quiver with subsonic vibrations. These halted suddenly, began again, and then were gone. The last of his bitterly acquired fuel was exhausted.

Weightlessness caught his tortured body, sending anguished cramps through him and threatening to end his hard-held hold on consciousness. He mastered himself after a moment of retching, and reached for the tiny crank that would spin the gyroscopes. He turned it madly, to the limit of his strength. Imperceptibly, the view of Earth in the plate that showed the ship's rear began to twist.

It took time to turn the ship that way, and he had little time left. The atmosphere was rushing up. He'd been luckier than he had expected; the rocket had killed most of his speed. But now he had to strike that two-hundred mile layer of air head foremost. The crank seemed to fight against him, but the ship was swinging. Here in space, Newton's third law worked perfectly. For every action, an equal and opposite reaction. A few thousand turns of the little wheel geared to the crank would turn the ship half a revolution in the other direction.

Four years before, when he had turned over to brake down to the Moon, it had been easy. He'd been strong, then, full of energy. He'd been the conquering hero. Months of conditioning and training had gone by, and he had walked up the ramp to the ship entrance with perfect health and complete confidence. He'd grinned at the generals and the reporters gathered to see the first manned flight to the Moon, and he'd known he would come back.

Well, he was coming back—through no help from them. The ship had been a gem, and the landing on the Moon had been almost routine. He'd sent back

his radar message, located the single unmanned supply ship they'd sent ahead, and settled down to getting ready for the other ones still to arrive.

They never came, and there was no message back from Earth!

When he landed, July 5, 1948, he had had enough food to last him nearly four months, counting the supplies in the unmanned ship. He hadn't worried too much, at first. Air was renewed by the pumpkin vines and tomatoes that filled one chamber of the ship, and the water he used was recovered automatically. Something had held up his supply ships, but they'd be along shortly with the water that served as fuel for the big atomic-powered rocket; as for the message, probably something was wrong with his receiver.

In August, he began worrying, after he'd caught bits of some conversation on his microwave set and found it worked perfectly. There was still no message directed at him. He tried to reason it out, and decided that they must have somehow decided he was dead. He began cutting down on his eating, and planting more tomatoes and pumpkins frantically. There would be another ship up, to try it again, but it was going to take longer, probably. He'd have to survive until it landed, and then prove he wasn't dead by reaching it. He couldn't understand why they didn't hear his calls, since the radar seemed to transmit okay. But he could find out all about it when the next ship landed.

By the beginning of 1949, he was sick of pumpkins and tomatoes, and beginning to wonder. That was when he started looking up at Earth and cursing it. It wasn't until almost 1950, though, that he gave up all hope, along with attempts to understand.

It nearly broke him. But Bill Soames had been picked carefully, and he wasn't the type to give up. It took him over two years to build a solar oven out of the supply ship parts and begin baking water out of the gypsum he finally located. Then only a trickle seemed to come from his crude pipes. He hoarded it painfully, beginning to fill his fuel tanks.

He had to stop to find minerals to enrich the hydroponic tanks. He wasted days and weeks lying sick and near death from exposure, exhaustion, and near-starvation. He developed deficiency troubles, and he refused to give in to them. He never thought of failure. They'd abandoned him, and he cursed Earth

with every weakened breath. But he was going back.

Finally, he stripped the ship of every drop of water he could spare, leaving himself almost none. He had already moved most of the plants into a crude hot-house outside. Now he drained their tanks, and decided that with that, added to what he had got from the gypsum, he had fuel enough.

In the spells of sickness, he had lost track of time. But he was fairly sure it was near the end of April, 1952, when he finally blasted off and headed back for Earth.

The ship was pointing ahead towards the cloud-filled atmosphere now. Soames dropped his hand from the crank, shaking with exhaustion, and waited for the first sign of air outside. He was falling fast, but that couldn't be helped.

He let the weakness grip him for a moment longer, while cold sweat stood out on his forehead, and time seemed to hang still in his frozen mind. Then he reached for the controls that would guide the ship down on its stubby wings.

The controls resisted faintly when he touched them. The refrigerator inside the ship was whining, and he knew the hull must be hot already. This was familiar ground—he'd piloted experimental rocket planes enough to have the feel of supersonic flight. It was a matter of keeping the ship up in the superthin air until it began to lose speed, then letting it glide down to a landing.

He should hit somewhere inside the Atlantic Coast, from his rough calculations. He might do damage there—but the chances were against it. Anyhow, they hadn't thought of him for four long years—they'd have to take their chances now.

The ship was getting hot inside. He fought against the controls, trying to hold it just inside the atmosphere until its speed came down enough. The clouds below were lost from his sight. He stole a quick glance at the thin section of hull he could see. It wasn't glowing yet.

He fought mechanically, with his mind buried somewhere down in its deepest sections, trying not to think. The ship groaned, and the stubby wings seemed about to fall off. Somewhere to the rear, something gave with the sound of an express rifle. The ship grew hotter. The thin, worn coveralls were wet with his sweat, and the wristwatch seemed to burn his skin.

Then the speed was dropping, and he was going into his glide.

He came down through the clouds, finally, just as he left the darkness behind. His eyes darted to the little port that would show the surface below. He should be nearing the coast.

Soames' gasp was a hoarse choke. The line that separated sea and land was directly below him! He'd overshot. He drew back on the control, trying to steepen the glide, but it was already too late. The ship went plunging down through the air, heading out to sea. He cursed to himself, but there was nothing to be done, in the time left. He began a slow turn, but he knew it would fail.

He was miles from land when the first sound of the water slapping against the ship reached his ears. She was coming down smoothly enough. Spray leaped up, and the ship lurched as the braking force of the sea hit it while it still was making better than 200 miles per hour. But he managed to avoid being thrown forward. Then she was skipping a bit, with the sound of rifle-like popping coming from the rear again. A moment later, the ship was coasting smoothly over the fairly calm sea.

He was down—home—back to Earth—and alive!

And brother, would the brass hats have some explaining to do now!

Wetness touched his bare feet. He jerked his eyes down, to see an inch of water on the "floor" of the ship—and it was rising as he looked. The ship had sprung a leak during the battle through the air and the pounding of the landing. Now it would sink almost at once.

Bill threw the straps of the seat off and was on his feet, jumping for the airlock as he saw it. With a leak, this thing would sink like a piece of lead. He grabbed down his good-luck charm as he went. The sheaf of hundred dollar bills—eight in all—had been left from the going-away present his mother had sent him, and he'd forgotten them until half way out from Earth. Somehow, they had always been a symbol that he'd get back—but now, if he lived, they'd be of more immediate use. He reached for the packet of exposed film, but the water was coming up too fast; it touched the control-board and the films slid along the wet surface and vanished. There was no time to grope for them.

Soames struggled through the water as the little lock finally opened. He pulled himself out. The land was lost from view, and the sea was all around him.

But there was no time to wait. He jumped into the water and began paddling frantically. It

was icy cold, and it shocked his body, driving the breath from his lungs. In his emaciated condition, keeping afloat was going to be hard work. Eight miles . . .

It never really occurred to him that he couldn't make it. He was heading toward the land when the suction of the ship's sinking caught him, and he didn't look back. He settled down to the best compromise between endurance and speed he could make and drove on. He was back on Earth, and they couldn't defeat him now.

Fifteen minutes later, the boat appeared. It was a Coast Guard cutter, he saw. It circled, and a line was tossed to him. On the rail, he could see the figures of men. All the loneliness of the long years on the Moon hit at him, then. He pulled on the line, dragging forward; it wasn't the thought of rescue, but the sound of human voices that drove him now.

"I'm Bill Soames," he began shouting, over and over.

They pulled him up, crying something to him—something about luck that had let them see his plane going down on their radar screen. But he hardly heard the words.

"I'm Soames," he repeated. "Major William Soames. Goddamn it, can't you understand? That was a rocket ship—the *Lunatic*. I've come back from the Moon. Four years—four damned long years—but I've come back."

"Shock," one of the men said. "Okay, Bill, take it easy. You'll be all right."

He shrugged off their hands. "I *am* all right. Damn it, don't you even remember me? I took off for the Moon in 1948—July 1, 1948! Now I'm back!"

He saw consternation on their faces and pity mixed with it. He shook his head. After all the publicity there had been, it hardly seemed that a man on Earth could help knowing about the trip. Yet maybe these men hadn't heard. Maybe they didn't care about rockets and the Moon.

"Didn't get a rocket out of the atmosphere until February, 1949," the Coast Guardsman said slowly. "That was when they shot the Wac Corporal up, using the V-2 to carry her. Got up about 250 miles, as I remember it. Brother, this is 1952—not 1975. You've been seeing too much fantasy on the television. Come on, we'll fix up a bunk."

A fine welcome for a hero, Bill thought. He'd expected his name to be enough to stop them cold. Now something was stopping him . . . tired . . . everything getting black . . . so tired, so dead. . . . He felt himself falling, but was too far gone into unconsciousness to care.

They held him two weeks in the hospital. The semi-starvation and the exhaustion had added to the shock of the cold swim. But he hadn't been delirious, as they claimed. He'd recovered the first night. Maybe he had raved a little—surely among all those doctors and nurses, one should have known about the take-off of the Moon ship, or should have known his name. They'd pretended to, after a while; but he knew they had been lying. They really believed all that guff about Man still being unready for Space!

He finished his lunch and reached for the dessert. Then he shuddered violently, and shoved it away. Pumpkin pie! His stomach seemed to turn over at the sight of it, and he pushed it as far from him as he could. Tomatoes and pumpkins were no longer fit to eat, as far as he was concerned.

He reached for the book on the table again. *Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel*, by Willy Ley. He'd read the original version of it in 1947. This edition bore the date of 1951. It had a good deal of new material and all the charm and sound thinking he expected of Ley. But it didn't fit with his memory of a big, black-haired man who had boomed out farewells to him while he climbed the ramp for the take-off. Ley wasn't just an expert—he was an enthusiast, and nobody wanted space-travel more than he did.

Yet the book contained no mention of Bill's flight. It didn't list the method of turning water to monatomic hydrogen and ozone for rocket fuel, discovered in 1946; there was nothing on the first compact atomic motor to provide power, built late in 1947. Botb had been highly secret at the time, but they had been announced publicly before his flight.

He'd expected to find proof of his facts in tbe book. Instead, he found only confusion for his mind. They couldn't have covered up that thoroughly. Yet the date of February 24, 1949 was listed for man's first step beyond the atmosphere—the same 250 mile flight the Coast Guardsman had mentioned.

Soames sighed, and dropped the book as the nurse came for his tray, the eternal mechánical smile on her lips. "Dr. Willoughby will see you soon," she told him.

He'd tried to talk to her, but he knew it was useless. These people really didn't know about his trip. It should have been on the front pages of every newspaper in the world, and there shouldn't be a literate person alive who didn't know of it. In-

stead, they had treated his facts as the ravings of a man suffering from shock.

What could account for something big enough to suppress such news—not only to suppress it, but to kill what had already gone before?

Even his former commanders had failed him. He'd been refused the right to send a telegram, but the Coast Guardsman who had visited him had promised to mail his letters to the men of Operation Space. General Bartley should have come tearing in, threatening to rip the place apart unless he was released at once. But the letters had vanished, if they had ever been mailed, without an answer.

Dr. Willoughby came in quietly. "Well, young man, how do you feel today? Still think you're chasing girls on the moon, heh?"

Soames wanted to push the smiling face back into the man's adenoids, but he managed to grin. In hospitals, you had to grin. He'd learned already that patients had to humor doctors and nurses and agree to anything they suggested.

"No more of that," he answered. "I still can't remember, but I'm sane enough. When do I get out of here?"

The doctor seemed to consider it weightily. "Well, now, I guess we can let you go. You did some fearful things to that body of yours—just what I can't tell; but you're well enough now. A little amnesia, of course, but that will wear off. Such cases happen from shock. You sure you want to leave?"

"I certainly am. I can get a job. . . ."

The doctor wasn't listening. He nodded without waiting to hear the answer. "The nurse will bring you clothes, and then lead you to my office. I'll have some papers there. And there's a Colonel Hadley to see you."

He was gone before Soames' shout could get from his throat. So the Army had his letters! The hospital must have been holding him until Hadley could get there. They'd been stalling, but not for the reason he had expected. Now his troubles would soon be over.

He signed for the clothes they had bought at his order and the property they held for him. The clothes were picked without taste, as if some store had packaged them at random. He looked more human when he finished shaving. His face was still gaunt and tense, and his hair was thin and white, as it had grown in after a long bout of illness. But he felt almost himself again as he followed the girl to the doctor's office.

Willoughby introduced him and withdrew discreetly. Colonel Hadley was a plump, youngish man, with the rocky face and false pleasantness that could carry a man to his position quickly, but would never let him advance much beyond it. He obviously had no imagination, and couldn't trust it in others.

He got down to business at once. "These your letters? Umm. Well, I've been talking to Dr. Willoughby. Understand you were pretty sick. So we won't discuss this nonsense about the moon. In fact, under the circumstances, perhaps we can forget. . . ."

"Did you ever hear of Major William Soames?" Bill asked. "Before this, I mean?"

"Certainly. That's what made Bartley send me up here, instead of routine procedure. Naturally. Soames was on Bartley's flight over Berlin when the Nazis got him. Brave man. Saved Bartley's life. Got a posthumous Congressional Medal, you know. A hero."

"He—he *died*?"

"Right. May 23, 1943. Sad business. Had a brother—Lieutenant Roger Soames—on the same flight. Both got it."

Bill Soames let his legs lower him carefully into a chair, studying the Colonel's face. It wasn't the face of a man who could lie. It was the face of a man reporting hard fact that he knew to be true. Yet it was the sheerest nonsense. Bill had started on that flight—but his plane had developed motor trouble half an hour out from England and he'd put back. He'd always felt he was somehow to blame for Roger's death. He tried to say something, but no words would come.

"Very sad," Hadley added. "Never knew Major Soames, but I got on well with his brother. Saw the whole business myself. Felt sick for a whole day afterwards—first Roger, then the Major." He cleared his throat. "You can guess what we thought when we heard you were impersonating him. Naturally, we had to investigate. Crank letters come often enough, but not like that. Deuce of it was that Bartley swore it was like the Major's handwriting. And you know, you do look a little like the pictures I saw. . . . Know what happens to anyone who impersonates an Army officer, young man? Bad. But—well, Dr. Willoughby tells me it was just shock. What about that?"

"I'm—I'm Bill Soames," Soames answered, while his head went around in crazy circles. He tried to pretend it was a gag to himself, but it wasn't. He fell back on the lying that had finally convinced the staff of his sanity.

"I—I guess I must have been kind of a hero worshipper; when I got the shock, I thought I was the other William Soames—and went all the way on the hero stuff. If I caused you any trouble. . . ."

"You did. You certainly did. Two days up here, checking your fingerprints, doing everything. Prints don't match, of course. Took me a whole day in Washington just getting Soames' prints, too, you know. Funny, you'd think they'd be careful with the records of a hero; almost lost! Heh! Well, anyhow, I guess we can close the case. No sign of fraud. Hope you get your full memory back."

He stood up to go, and Bill got to his feet. He took the other's perfunctory handshake and watched him leave. He saw Willoughby come in, beaming. There must have been some exchange of words, though he couldn't remember them. Then the papers were signed, and he was going out of the hospital. The sun was shining brightly as he came down the steps, mechanically counting out the four hundred odd dollars he had left.

It *had* to be hypnotism. Hadley had thought he was telling the truth. But they had hypnotic drugs now. They might use them, if they wanted to pretend a man who'd flown to the Moon had been dead years before. If General Bartley had meant to send Soames a warning that the subject was top secret, and to go slow . . . if he'd been unable to come himself. . . .

It still didn't make sense. It hadn't made sense when they had abandoned him on the Moon, and it made less now. What national danger could possibly be averted by lying about this—particularly when they were still talking about the fact that the first nation to get a base on the Moon would rule Earth?

There was only one answer. He had to see Bartley in person. He was due in Washington, it seemed—overdue by some four years.

Seeing Bartley proved to be more trouble than he'd thought. The Pentagon wasn't open to casual visitors—not the part he wanted. He couldn't use his own name, either. But even Generals are human beings. They eat, and they have to have places to sleep. Soames gave up direct efforts, and waited patiently.

He was lucky. He spotted Bartley getting into a car alone on the third day, just as he was driving up to park his own rented car. He could tell the way the gears ground that the man was bound for the old familiar place. Bartley was short and

plump, a little Santa Claus of a man with fierce hlack hair and a totally unconvincing hristle of a mustache. When he was angry, he looked more jovial than ever —which was probably why he had his favorite bar well out in Bethesda, away from the usual run of other officers.

Soames kept a casual eye on the car, hut he was sure of himself when Bartley headed out Wisconsin Avenue. He drove into the little parking lot, just as Bartley disappeared into the pleasant har across the way. Then he took his time. The General would need a beer hy himself before he could he approached. When Bill finally went in, he found the place almost unchanged. He ordered his own beer and moved back to the juke-box. Bartley was sitting beside it. He set his heer on the table, and hegan feeding nickels into the machine. None of the new tunes meant anything to him, hut luck was still with him. There was one of the old platters there—"A Long Long Trail." He let it start, and saw Bartley glance up.

Soames had worn a hat to cover his hair, but he had carefully turned his face to the light. Now he saw Bartley's eyes slip to his own, and hesitate. He smiled faintly, drew an answering donhtful smile, and slipped into the booth. The other man offered no ohjections.

"Beer here is worth coming a long ways for," Bill said casually. "Worth a quarter million miles."

The General smiled doubtfully, then frowned as if the joke escaped him. It was a good act, Bill had to admit. "Good beer," he finally admitted. "Like the stuff the Germans had for their officers—almost."

"Honigshrau," Bill agreed. "A couple cases of it. They'd just started to crack it and drink when we strafed 'em. It was warm by the time we reached the shack, but it was worth all the trouhle we had."

The General nodded. "Good. Dark and heavy stuff. I can still taste it. Used to . . ."

His mouth fell open, making him look more than ever like a comic cherub. "Good God! Man, you couldn't be! You . . . Bill Soames!"

Bill nodded, and the fears washed away. "In the flesh, Tom. I had a helluva time getting back —I'm still mad about being left there. But I knew you'd be glad to see me!"

"Glad! You sunovagun! We knew you were dead. You couldn't have lived in that smash-up. Bill!" He was pumping Bill's hands, his own arm

jerking spasmodically. "Man, wait'll they hear about this!"

"They don't seem to want to hear about it," Bill told him.

"They will, boy, they will! We didn't go through the war together for nothing!"

"Or Operation Space? Remember how we used to dream about that, when I found you were human enough to read those stories. Rockets—space. . . . We didn't think then. . . ."

Bartley sighed. "Yeah. And when the V-2's fell into our hands, I did a lot more dreaming, Bill. It was tough, not getting assigned to White Sands. I really wanted to work on the rockets. But I guess they knew what they were doing when they turned me down."

"They turned you down?" Hell, Tom Bartley had been the one to get him in, after his first application was turned down. Bartley had been the first officer picked for the job.

"They did. I guess I forgot about your being somewhere in Germany— Say, when did you get back? And how? Come on, give."

Bill sat back, staring at him. It was his turn to sit with his mouth open. He glanced up to see if anyone else could have come near to cut off the honesty he'd found here before. They were alone. The bartender was at the other end, and all the booths were deserted.

"Okay," he said. "I guess you had some reason for the game, but not between us, Tom. Leaving me up on the Moon without answering my signals was a dirty trick. It took me four years to get back, and then I cracked your precious ship into the ocean, where the salt water can eat its magnesium to bits. But it's time to stop the pussy-footing. You know damned well I never cracked up on the Moon. I've left my signature up there. Now I'm back. And I want some explanations."

Bartley's face had gone white, and now was turning fiery red. His hand around the beer glass tautened until the glass snapped. Blood seeped out on his fingers, but he didn't look at it. Finally he took a deep breath.

"For a minute you fooled me," he began in a deadly quiet voice. "For a minute. I was fool enough to think Bill Soames had managed to live somehow, when I knew he'd burned up in the plane. But I should have remembered those damned letters. You fooled Hadley—he thought you were sick, not crazy. But you can't fool me. You damned rotten . . ."

The fist that landed in Bill's

face hardly traveled six inches, but it was backed by sheathes of muscles that only looked like fat. Bill's head snapped back against the rear of the booth, while hot pain lanced through him. He slid down, barely holding onto his aching consciousness. He heard Bartley get up and dash to the phone. He heard the crisp orders to come for him.

For a second, he wanted to lie there and let them get him. There was nothing left. The others could be fooled or try to fool him—but Tom Bartley wouldn't do that. That blow had been based on real feelings. Bartley had believed he'd never worked at White Sands. And generals weren't hypnotized, even for security.

Then the stubbornness that had carried him through four years of desertion on the Moon and brought him back alive came to the surface. He shook the blackness away from his head, sending up lancing pains, and got to his feet. The beer bottle was under bis hand. He lifted it, and threw it, four feet behind Bartley. As the man turned toward it, his legs drove him forward. He was out of the bar, and across the street. He threw a bill at the parking attendant, and gunned his rented car to life. Then he began twisting crazily through side streets. Washington wouldn't be healthy for him after this.

He had no time to think, but his mind had already been made up. There was one place and only one where he could go. And he'd better get started there fast.

Tbe key that had been with his wallet—the stuff he'd forgotten to leave behind when he took off—still fitted the lock. He opened the door of the quiet apartment when no one answered his knock. The furniture was mostly the same, and there were pictures of himself and Roger on the piano. He called, but there was no answer. Then he moved back toward the windows that opened on Central Park South.

It was hard to believe, after the war, the tests, and the Moon, that he'd grown up here, in the quiet luxury of the money his father had left them. But he found his old room still as it had been the last day before he left. He closed the door on it quickly; it brought back too much that be'd forgotten.

He found a chair near the door and settled down to wait. The rest of the world might deceive him. Even Tom Bartley might lie—he'd left Bill on the Moon, and he probably had enough guilt feelings from that to account for anything. But Bill knew that his mother would-

n't lie to the craziest stranger. Surely he'd find the truth here. She had never understood his craving for adventure beyond Earth, and she wouldn't know too much about advances in the world. But she'd accept him. All their lies about his having died over Berlin wouldn't mean anything to her, after they'd spent so many week-ends here when the war was over. She'd remember the ring on his finger that had been her idea, to help him cut his way out of a Nazi prison if he were captured; she'd thought that diamonds were somehow safe and that they could cut steel bars as well as glass. She'd remember the thousand dollars that had been meant to give him a grand party with the men, since he insisted on being fool enough to try to reach the Moon. She'd been tearful then, but she'd seen something of his drive, and had seemed proud of him, at the end.

He sat there, soaking up peace and quiet from the room around him. The sunlight disappeared from the windows at the far end, and there was a bit of gloom that finally ended when the street-lights went on. They left the room thick with shadows, and rich with the fancies he'd woven around them when he was only a kid, playing with Roger. He made no effort to turn on the light, but waited quietly.

Then he heard the elevator stop, and her feet on the floor of the hall. He was still sitting as the key turned in the lock, and a beam of light struck him. She closed the door quietly, looking older and frailer than he remembered, but still upright and carrying herself with the ordered pride of good breeding.

She snapped on the lights and turned to face him. For a moment, surprise struck her. Then she mastered herself. "Good evening, young man. How did you get in here?" Her voice was firm, but calm enough, as if this were a minor upset in some fond routine.

He stood up, moving toward the light. She watched him, then smiled doubtfully. "If you're a burglar, you're quite welcome to what money I have here. Only don't make any commotion, please. I can't stand vulgarity." She was trying to make a joke of it, he knew. Then her voice caught. "But you . . . you look like . . ."

"Hi, Mom," he said, nodding.

She stood there, suddenly old and shrunken, though her back was straighter than ever. Her perfectly applied make-up was ghastly on her white face. She backed against the door slowly,

while her hand went to her throat.

"You look like Bill—like Bill like Bill. Just like Bill." It was a soft moan, unconscious. "Bill was a nice boy. He died in the war—the same time Roger died. It wasn't fair. He died—they told me he died horribly. And they sent me his papers, what was left—and half a letter he'd begun—and they gave him a medal. He was such a nice boy. I saved them all . . . I . . ."

She began to fall, still stiffly. Bill caught her in his arms, and eased her onto a couch. He'd never seen her faint before. He knew she hadn't fainted when she'd heard that Roger had been killed. He stood helpless. Finally he lowered her head and raised her feet, waiting for her to come to. His eyes moved to the drawer where she'd stared, the drawer under the two smaller pictures from their childhood.

He found them all there—the deatb notice, with its accusing date, half of a letter he actually had written—but completely—his papers, and some knick-knacks that seemed to have been in a fire!

He pawed through them quickly, and then went back to the couch. He knew what he had to do, and began rummaging into his few belongings. He was rubbing her forehead when she came to. She looked at him, but he was holding his face as taut as he could, to build up the lines that the hard years had put on it. She shook her head slowly.

"You're—not . . ."

"No, ma'am. I guess I forgot, calling you 'Mom' the way Bill always did. He was my buddy, you know. Used to laugh at how we looked alike. A great guy. We were in prison over there together. That's why I came back, to bring you this—all he had left when he died. But he didn't die in the plane, ma'am. They shot him trying to escape, and it was quick and painless. That's why I came here, why I had his key . . ."

He'd rehearsed it in his mind, but hadn't known whether it would work. Now he saw life come back into her. She drew herself up, and straightened her hair. Her voice was calm again. "Silly of me, of course. I—I'm glad you came. I never did believe Bill died in the plane. He was so much at home in any kind of machinery. Thank you for bringing my picture back to me. And now, can't I get you a drink, before I apologize for being so weak?"

He shook his head. "I'll have to rush, ma'am. I waited too long. Bill wanted you to have the picture—it was what he valued

most. But—well, I *have* got to rush."

She let him go. She was not the sort to hold any nervous man against his will. She saw him to the door, and her fingers rested briefly on his arm. The smile she gave him would have been reward enough, if his story had been true.

Then he went down the stairs and out into the night on this world which had erased him and which refused to admit he had ever left it.

There had been another picture in his wallet, but he'd been a fool to look at it. He'd looked at it often enough that first year up there, wondering whether she'd wait for him, but somehow the memory of Sherry had grown weak with time. He'd been a bigger fool to spend the night making phone calls to locate her.

He knew it now as he sat on the too-lavish couch. He'd heard a faint gasp when she first saw him, but she'd never thought he was Bill Soames, and he hadn't tried to tell her he was. He'd used the same line on her as he'd finally used on his mother, with a change in the picture. It sat on the table near her now, its water-stained younger image of her face staring up.

She slid a trifle sideways, exposing one knee from under her negligee, and reached across him for her drink. She'd always had a nice bosom, and she'd always known it. She sipped the drink and put it back. "Poor Bill," she said throatily. "He was such a kid—but I guess I was too, then. I suppose he really expected me to wait for him?"

"I don't know—maybe not," Bill answered her. "Things were pretty tough in the prison."

"I meant to wait for him. But it was so long. I guess it wasn't very nice, marrying Bob Stanton just six months after Bill went overseas, but you know how it is. And then we heard Bill had died, but I was just having Junior . . ."

"Junior?" Bill jerked at that, his eyes flickering over the slightly too-decorated room. She couldn't have had a child in 1943—she *had* waited for him; she'd promised to wait again when he left for the rocket in 1947. And imagination wouldn't supply a child . . .

She laughed and pointed to a picture of a boy of about eight. "He's away at school now, of course. You know how important it is give them the *best* education." She sighed, and reached for the drink. "But it's terribly hard on a boy's mother, having him away. The place gets so lonely, now that Bob's away in

Washington so much of the time. Sometimes I think I'll go mad . . ."

She wasn't even subtle about it. For a moment, it worked. Bill had spent too long away from women. Then the ease of her passion was too much for him; it told him too strongly what a fool he'd been ever to believe her accounts of the missing dates that had always come between them. He pushed her away, pulled her negligee shut firmly, and added insult to the injury by making no attempt to turn his eyes away.

She was just switching from surprise to querulous hurt as his feet carried him across the living room to the foyer. Her voice was rising to a shriek of outraged anger as he closed the door behind him. This time the night air felt good. There were worse things than being marooned on the Moon. He might have come back and married her!

Then he frowned. It wasn't night, anymore, after all. The street-lights were still on, but day was breaking in the east.

He grimaced. Well, he'd gotten things out of the night. He'd found that his mother knew he was dead, and had been dead years before he took off for the Moon; he'd found the papers that had the authentic appearance of age to prove it. He'd found that the girl who'd been single and willing to wait for him in 1947 had not only been married, but had had a child in 1943 or 1944. That would take some explaining! He couldn't swear to some things about her, but he knew damned well there had been no marriage or child in the past from which he came.

It hit him, then—the stories he'd read once had been filled with the idea that time is a matter of multiple choice, and that the future is a fan-shaped thing, with many branches. If he'd gone to the Moon from one such probability world and somehow gotten switched over to another on the return—a world where he had never left . . .

He shrugged. It was fine for speculation, but there was no way to account for such a switch. Anyhow, that stuff was based on the need for a good story-gimmick, and not on facts. There was a lot more sense in a universe where there was an absolute relation between cause and effect. This was the same world he'd left—however much deceit was involved, and whatever the tricks they used to deny him. It might be a crazy world, but not one of those improbable ones.

He considered that. A crazy world—or one person who was crazy. Then he grinned savagely.

He didn't feel crazy. It was no solution, anyhow. If he were crazy, he wouldn't know it. The same stubbornness that had let him survive for four years on the Moon made him reject the idea at once. There *had* been times when the whole world was wrong and only one man was right; as far as he was concerned, this waa another such case.

He came up to a newsstand and stood staring at the magazines. There were more dealing in the fantastic than be remembered, but they looked familiar. Space-ships and weird landscapes vied witb half-nude girls and bug-eyed monsters. He started to buy one, and then gave up the idea; after being up there, he didn't want someone else's guess. As for alien life-forms . . .

He thought about it for a second, but little more. Maybe some alien civilization that wanted to keep man Earthbound migbt suppress knowledge and even change memories; but it didn't fit the case. It would have heen easier for such a race to eliminate him, or to prevent the sbip ever having taken off. Tbere was no answer there.

He bought a newspaper and went into a coffee shop for breakfast. He still enjoyed eating real food. The sight of two eggs, over light, surrounded by crisp bacon, together with toast and coffee was better than any scene off Earth. He took his plate to a little table and began glancing through the paper as he ate. Most of the news meant notbing to him—the war beginning in Asia now so soon after the last war was something be preferred to ignore. Most of the rest of the paper was filled with things that he couldn't understand or didn't care to read. Even tbe comics were dull, without the continuity of regular reading.

Then he stopped, and looked back at a picture. Professor Arnold Rosenblum had delivered a lecture on the need for a space station outside Earth's atmosphere. When interviewed later at the Weldon Arms Hotel, he had stated . . .

Rosenhlum had heen tbe man who had invented the method of using water as the propellant! He'd been part of Operation Space from the beginning. If Bill could see him . . .

He knew the result. Rosenblum wouldn't remembher. Yet the man was a scientist, and science isn't something that deals with belief. It sticks to facts. Bill turned it over, considering. The man might not believe a word be would have to say—yet he couldn't argue against provable facts. And to a real scientist,

there were facts that could be proved!

The phone booth was in the back, and there was no trouble in getting his message put through to the scientist. Apparently men of science still didn't have to be suspicious of callers, as did movie stars. The voice at the other end was sleepy, but not hostile. "Yes?"

"Dr. Rosenblum? I'm James Cross, a former student—class of '44. I was wondering whether I could see you—about the space stations? I—" He halted his story about being a reporter, considering what he knew of the man. Then he hesitated deliberately. "I—I don't have any reason to bother you, but I missed your lecture, and I couldn't get much out of the newspaper articles. For breakfast, perhaps?"

"Cross?" Rosenblum seemed to turn it over and decide namea didn't matter. "Well, why not? I don't wonder you couldn't understand the newspaper account. Ten minutes—wait, where are you?"

"Ten minutes will be fine," Bill told him. "And thanks."

"Pleasure. Always glad to find someone still curious. Usually they forget after college." The phone clicked down, covering the last of a yawn. Bill went outside quickly to flag a cab.

It took fifteen minutes, but he managed to beat the professor to the lobby. Rosenblum was tall and thin, with a face like that of Lincoln, and eyes that managed to be both sharp and friendly, even with traces of sleep in them. He made no comment at not recognizing Bill.

Soames had given up expecting recognition. He ordered breakfast again, and grinned at Rosenblum's order—the scientist obviously believed in enjoying life. Then he plunged into it.

"I've been thinking that problem of fuels over, Dr. Rosenblum. You mentioned flourine and berylium as a theoretical ideal. What about ozone and monatomic hydrogen? Wouldn't they have a higher exhaust velocity? Maybe enough to avoid the need for a step rocket?"

"Very fine," Rosenblum admitted with a grin, around a thick slice of bam. "Excellent—if you'll tell me how to get them and store them."

"Don't. Make them out of water. Like tbis." Bill pulled out a pad and began scribbling on it, mixing it with comments as he gave all that he could remember of what Rosenblum had originally discovered. He was watching for signs of suspicion, but there were none. The professor showed interest, but no indication that this was some highly secret discovery of his own.

He studied it. "You'd need power for this, of course, Mr. Cross. But I suppose the work being done on submarine atomic motors might provide that, for a large ship. Still . . ."

Bill relaxed at the interest on the otber's face. Facts—science had to deal with facts. And no casual interviewer could know enough about both fuels and atomics to reveal such information—Rosenblum would have to believe him. "I've been thinking about it. If we use a heavy-water moderated pile, but design it . . ."

He plunged into that. It was hard work, trying to remember it all, but he was sure he'd covered most of the points. Rosenblum sat back, his breakfast forgotten, nodding. Bill looked up with a final nod of his own at the scrawls on the paper. "Well?"

"Interesting. Unfortunately, it won't work. I tried to do exactly that with water for a fuel back in 1946—and it failed. The theory looks good—but it takes too much power. I had some students working on it, too, but we had to abandon the idea. As for your atomic motor . . ." He shook his head sadly. "Well, that's out of my field, but some of the

material they've just released covers such an idea. I understand it isn't controllable."

"But—"

Rosenblum shook his head and began attacking his breakfast again. "Oh, I think you've done a lot of clear thinking, and I'm not calling you a fool, young man. I only wish I had a few more students like you. But you have to remember that there are hundreds of men working on these things today, and they've had these ideas, too. It's a beautiful piece of logic—but unfortunately, logic isn't everything; it won't work."

"It did work!" Bill told him grimly. "It worked when you tried it in 1946! Security be damned! I know it. I was the guy who rode the rocket using it to the Moon and back! I tell you, I *know!*"

A change crept over Rosenblum's face. He studied Bill for a moment, then shook his head, making clucking sounds.

"Another one, eh? Last week it was my colleague, Dr. Dickson, who had invented a variation of this, late in 1949. Now *I* invented it in 1947. And of course, the man who told him about it had been to the Moon personally, too. You don't fit the description, or I might think you were the same man. Mr. Cross, in spite of what the papers say, college professors are neither credulous idiots nor crazy."

He picked up his check, and put down change for the tip. "I have no intention of reporting you to the establishment. But I think you'd be wise to leave, at once! Good day."

Rosenblum walked toward the cashier, leaving Bill to stare down at the working diagrams that had taken him to the Moon, but had been proven not to work. Sure, science dealt in facts! It had been a beautiful theory.

The library had a complete file of the *New York Times* back through 1947. Bill had half expected to find missing issues, but they were all there. He riffled back to June, thumbing through. The advance feelers put out by the Army were there—meaningless by themselves, of course, but leading up to what was to come. He came to July, and tensed.

There were no missing headlines—but there was nothing on the flight of a rocket to the Moon. He combed July thoroughly. There was no mention of him. He went back to July 2nd, when the news should have been broken. On the front page, one of the men who had covered the take-off had a by-line story; it dealt with ordinary news, though, and would have required that the man be in New York the

day before. Bill turned to the science columns—and again, a name that had been among those covering the take-off hit his eye. But the story dealt with something totally unrelated to the flight, and again would have had to be written by a man nowhere near the take-off spot!

It took him four hours to complete his search, and netted him only one item. That stopped him when he came to it. It was in the same month; this time it was a more sensational paper, and the account was buried under a miscellaneous collection of scandals. *Ham Claims Contact With Man In Moon!* It seemed that a radio amateur had picked up a signal from someone who claimed to be marooned on the Moon, asking for supply ships. It must have been *his* signal!

He took it to be photostated, amazed at his violent reaction to even this bit of evidence. His hands were trembling as he held it up and pointed out the piece. But the man who came to help him only glanced at it with amusement.

"Fortean, eh? Well, I get a kick out of such things, too. But you'll find a lot of things like this printed in the summer. That's why reporters call it the silly season, I guess." He read through it, grinning again. "Mm-hm. They ran almost the same story in 1950—I remember it, because my father was visiting us . . . You know, I had a man here a couple weeks ago who told me he sent the message. Never cracked a grin . . . Hey, mister, don't you want your stat?"

Bill went down the street slowly. He'd have to get a room, of course. And a job. His money wouldn't last forever—even if he hocked the diamond ring and his watch. Time for lunch. Hell, he wasn't hungry. He glanced at a television store, noticing that the screens looked immense, though the prices were lower than he'd thought they would ever be. But men could make progress in amusement, even if their leading scientists insisted they'd failed at work that might have sent man to the planets, given time.

He bought a paper and skimmed it. He found the first of the "silly season" accounts on Page 7, though it wasn't summer yet. It dealt with the flying saucers, of course, since they were still the current fad. He turned on. Maybe it was a lean day, and news was scarce. Three pages further he found a brief mention of a 97-year-old woman who could recite the Bible in Hebrew, though she'd never spoken a word of it in her life.

Telepathy, she claimed; thought communication with a scholar who had lived two thousand years before.

He threw the paper in the disposal can, and stared up at the sign moving across the Times Building.

They'd covered up perfectly. There wasn't any real evidence left. A ship had disappeared on the Moon, but nobody had missed it. A man who waited for help was tagged as dead years before, and even his own mother could remember how he had died. Science had proved that he couldn't make the trip with the equipment he had. The papers were complete—and spurious.

It was the stuff of madness. Yet he knew inside himself he wasn't mad. Somehow, reality had been altered for everyone here. A thousand men who had seen the ship take-off now probably all knew that they had been doing something else. Papers had been changed.

Men had invented the steamboat long before Fulton. Their attempts had been buried, though some of them had worked. Leif Ericson had crossed the Atlantic and discovered America before Columbus—and the account had been lost, until the evidence was found. Had the facts been altered then? Had Ericson come home to find that everyone knew he had been in Iceland all along? And then, when the evidence was finally found, centuries later after America had been discovered again, had things been doctored up the opposite way, so that people thought the evidence had been there all along?

What about the hot-air engine? It was known before the gasoline motor, and it had been just as good. Yet it had lain unused for decades, until after gasoline was powering every car on the road; then it had been rediscovered, and someone had scratched his head and wondered how it had been overlooked. Prontosil was developed during World War I, but the sulfa part wasn't used to kill germs until twenty years later. Penicillin had appeared and proved its germ killing power before 1930, but no one got around to using it until World War II.

Why was everything so significant overlooked? And would some man, a hundred years from now, stand on the Moon and stare down at his crude solar still, to recognize he'd been there first? Would they mysteriously find the accounts in old papers then, and wonder why they badn't known about it before?

Or would this ultimate step of

mankind be buried for good, while the race went on warring its way to destruction? A base on the Moon could spell enforced peace, if they got it in time

Bill walked on, without purpose. He was finished. There was no use fighting now. Maybe he really wasn't Bill Soames. Maybe he'd been James Cross all along—maybe a nephew of old Robert Cross, who'd inherited a small fortune when the old man died. Gone on a hunting trip by airplane, gotten lost, half starved before he could find the plane, then landed in the ocean. Three children, one a girl with amazing dark red hair and the deepest blue eyes that could smile at a man. A vision of a pleasant apartment swam into his mind. He'd better call home . . .

He cut it off savagely. He was Major William Soames, back to a crazy Earth after four years on the Moon. Neither his own mind nor any outside force was going to change his knowledge of that.

For a second, he was tempted to call the phone number that had been in his mind. Maybe there was such a number under the name of James Cross, and such a family. Maybe they had a convenient slot for him to fit into, just as they'd destroyed his own slot. But he couldn't fool with it. Giving in might be just what they wanted—whoever or whatever *they* were.

He shook his head. It was too late to change his mind. The doubtful number had disappeared, along with the fantasms that went with it. He was no longer uncertain about himself, at least. Yet he knew that he had to find some kind of proof, if he didn't want the fantasy thoughts to come back.

Where could he go for specific information? How could he locate the news from all the papers, dealing with a specific subject, instead of having to plow through edition after edition, requiring a life-time of effort?

Then he had it. There were clipping bureaus that did that for one. They could cull out everything except articles dealing with rockets, space-flight, and so on. He had no idea of the cost, but he could find out. He studied the signs along the street, and began pulling off the ring. He'd never get what it was worth—but even at a discount, five carats should be worth a considerable sum. Then he could investigate the clipping bureaus.

Again, luck changed capriciously. The ring had brought more than he'd expected—at least half of what it was worth —and he found the bureaus list-

ed in the classified section of the phone book. Most of them obviously specialized in names, rather than subjects. Some agreed that they could get him such clippings. And one stated rather doubtfully that they had some. But the seventeenth one seemed pleasantly surprised when he broached the idea.

"How about photostats? They do you as well?"

Bill could see no reason to object to that. The voice at the end of the line became even more pleasant. "Fine. We've been making up a file on that subject. Another day, and you'd have been too late. But we can run off a copy for you tonight, and have it ready at nine tomorrow. It'll save you a lot of expense, too. We've had to get extra copies of some of the papers from back years, and that runs into money, not counting the overtime work. This way, that's all paid for, and we can be pretty reasonable."

"Nine o'clock tomorrow," Bill agreed. "I suppose you'll want some money in advance?"

The voice brightened again. They made arrangements for a messenger to pick up the money in the lobby of a near-by hotel. Bill registered at the desk while waiting, using the same fictitious name he had given the agency. He was tired in a way that he'd never been during all the grueling effort to get back to Earth. It would be easy to relax and pretend the world was right—it was hard to keep fighting it. But something in his head refused to surrender. Somehow, he was going to collect the recognition they owed him, if it took him his whole remaining life time to get it!

He should have felt better after a night's sleep, but bitterness was apparently getting to be a habit again. Nine o'clock found him outside the clipping bureau. He saw tired, lackluster women entering and punching their cards into the time clock; they began gathering up newspapers and filing towards desks, where the routine job of marking, cutting, and pasting the items began. They'd probably throw away a thousand hints of new ideas and inventions that would be buried for years or decades, and never know what they had missed—if the news was even there. They'd go on collecting the names of men who liked to see those names in print. And at night they'd go home too tired and dreary to look up at the sky. Would it really make any difference if they knew that somewhere up there parts of a supply rocket had been turned into a solar still, so that a starved, crazy fool could come

back here to bring them news nobody would believe?

"Mr. Foster?" a voice behind him said for the third time, and he suddenly remembered that he'd chosen that as his name the day before. "Ah, good morning. Everything's ready—and quite a file, too. I was looking it over last night. Strange material here—enough for a book, at least. People hear messages from the Moon, people see big ships land, people announce they've built a rocket to go to Mars. A Coast Guard yeoman even reported picking a man out of the sea who claimed he'd just come from the Moon. Something about living up there four years without air or water. People! Are you a writer?"

"Sort of." Bill evaded his question. He picked up the file with a shudder at realizing he had made the news, even if it hadn't been quite the way he'd intended.

The clerk was busy making a flourish of computing the sales tax, then counting the money. Bill picked up the bulky envelope and started to leave, just as a big, blond man entered. The clerk nodded toward him. "The man who ordered this originally," he started, as if to introduce them.

But Bill didn't wait. He'd seen a quiet little bar on the corner, and he headed for it. It was nearly empty, and he found a booth off by himself, where he could go through the photostats.

Most of it was what he had expected, and it had been padded out with flying saucer stories, of course. He began weeding out the junk, keeping everything that seemed to have the faintest use. There was an account on July 1 of a kid who'd run away—it made no sense until a July 8 follow-up pasted to it showed that the kid had been found, safe enough, but swearing he'd gone to see the big rocket go up. Bill checked the date again. It was 1948, and the location had been about right. The kid could have run off to see him leave, if word had leaked. But it was no proof by itself.

"Hi," a soft voice said. The big blond man was sliding down across from him. "Hear you got a bargain. Not that I care—nothing exclusive. Interested in space flight?"

Bill frowned, and then decided he could use a little chance to talk socially. "You might say so," he admitted. "Mostly about the Moon. I got interested in Professor Rosenblum's lecture. It gets to be a bit expensive as a hobby, though."

"Pays off, if you know how. That's my angle. I make process shots for the movies, now that

they've gone in for this stuff. Do it cheaper and better than they can. I figured some of this might give me some ideas." The man'a voice was friendly, but he seemed vaguely disappointed, as if he had expected something else from Bill.

For his own part, Bill was wondering about leaving. It had seemed to offer some possibility for intereat when he'd realized that the other was sinking money into finding all he could about such things. But Bill wasn't interested in process shots. The films that had been lost on his ship were the real thing—and they showed it. No trick of photography could give the same effect.

He started to gather up the mess of photoatats, but the other had signaled for more beer. "I'm Brad Wollen."

"Bill Soames," he answered automatically, and then cursed himself as the other's eyebrows lifted. "A cousin of the fellow who got the Medal of Honor, if that's what you were thinking."

Wollen nodded. "Funny. And I'm the cousin of the Army test pilot who cracked up in that new supersonic job back in '49. Quite a coincidence, ian't it? Hey, wait a minute . . . didn't I see something about a guy who claimed he was your cousin in one of these . . ."

He began searching through the clippings busily. Bill swore hotly to himself. He'd thought his name had escaped publication —they usually left out names, in such cases. He shoved back his beer, and began framing an excuse to leave.

Then he stopped. Lying on the table was an eight-by-ten glossy picture. And it was no process shot. The lighting couldn't be duplicated. That was a shot of the Moon—the real Moon!

His bands fumbled witb it as he tried to pick it up. No tricks could do that! And the rocket ship in the background was too detailed for any of the stuff they were doing now. It was different from his—but it might have been another model of the same ship, just as this picture was like the crater he'd known, though not quite the same.

"It's real!" he aaid slowly. "The way the light bounces, the way those rocks look eroded, yet aren't rounded off! Damn it, you *can't* fake that."

He realized he was being a fool as he said it, but the words piled out before he could stop them. It wasn't the stupidity that brought him to a halt, though. It was the sudden blanched shock on the other man's face. Wollen had heaved himself half out of his seat and

was staring at him as if he'd just come out of hell, complete with brimstone.

"Mister, how do *you* know how those rocks look?" The man's voice was a hoarse whisper.

Bill sighed wearily. "Because I was the fool that took off in the first ship—in 1948, for the record. The blind fool who wouldn't die, but managed to live up there four years until I could come back here to be shown what a real fool is. Now go ahead and laugh. Tell me you never heard of a rocket then, and that Bill Soames died over Berlin. Tell me I'm a liar now!"

"I never heard of a '48 rocket, and I did hear you died." Wollen was sinking back slowly. "But it fits—Oh, God, how well it fits. Then—you did crash in the sea!"

He didn't wait for Bill's tensed, unbelieving nod. "I was luckier. I came down in a swamp, not sixty miles from here. Make way for the hero, home from the Moon! Did they abandon you without supplies, too? Yeah. It isn't fun, baking out water, if you did it the way I did. And it isn't fun when you find you're dead—were dead before you took off, and your wife swears your kids belong to the man she married the same day she married you, and . . . But I had the films. When the guys I showed them to told me they were nice process work, I caught on fast. I came closer to starving here than up there, at first. Now—well, I'm doing all right, that way. They like my process work! Almost looks real, they tell me. The blind fools! They won't even look at the ship—they call it clever of me to make such a big mock-up for my shots!"

His voice quieted suddenly. "I've been back three months. Sometimes I begin to think I never took off from Earth at all. I get funny ideas. But all the same, I took off in 1950, and I was up there seventeen months, on food enough for less than six."

They sat staring at each other, while Bill cursed himself. It had been thrown at him—the man who had approached Rosenblum's colleague, Dr. Dickson, must have been Wollen. Rosenblum had discovered the fuel method in 1946; Dickson had found it in 1949 . . .

His eyes dropped to the clippings, but Wollen was gathering them up. "It's a nice ship, still," he said. "It needs raising upright, and a little work. But you'll like it."

It *was* a nice ship—a better model in some ways than Bill's had been. But they'd discussed

that, and agreed it was natural. While the fuel trick had been buried, technology in other lines had advanced a little. If there was another, later ship, it would probably be better, though still not good enough.

And there was going to be another. The clippings had proved that. All the signs that Bill and Wollen could remember from their pasts were out again, obvious to those who could read the meaning. Somewhere, someone else had discovered how to use water in an atomic power plant for fuel, and they were building a ship. In another year, it would be winging up towards the Moon. And the whole story would start over again; the fuel supply rockets would not arrive, and somehow the headlines and memories on Earth would change.

Bill had a picture of thousands and millions of people scuttling about, destroying that "ridiculous" bit of evidence, or "correcting" some mistake, to hold man down from his great leap. It had been easy to keep him fooled once. The Greeks had invented a toy steam-engine twenty-five hundred years ago, and the idea had somehow been glossed over until Watt came along. It was harder now—it must take more work each time.

Whatever was causing it was losing. But that *whatever* might still win. Man was getting close to destruction now. He had bombs that could annihilate great masses. He had a thousand new toys of war. And he was blundering along, closer and closer to using them all.

Bill helped Wollen unload the new batch of supplies off the little truck into the shed beside the rocket. Around them, the swamp was a perfect camouflage, and the hollow into which the rocket had settled in its landing glide concealed it almost completely.

The blond man wiped his hands, and stopped for a breather, picking up the conversation where he'd dropped it. "You can't give them—or it—a name, Bill. Maybe it's caused by aliens, in spite of what we believe. Maybe it's caused by a group right here on Earth who can control men's thoughts on any one limited subject at a time. Maybe it's some supernatural drive. I've even thought about the old idea of the mass-mind, capable of taking over individual humanity; that would be a pretty basic, conservative force, and it wouldn't want newfangled ideas. The thing has been operating for a good many thousand years, fighting a constant delaying action. But this is its last stand. Once we spread out, we can't be con-

trolled—one planet will discover what the next one doesn't. It has to win now. And that means *we* have to win."

"We'll win," Bill answered him, and began unloading the truck again. "We've got to win, so we will."

Unconsciously, they both looked up to the sky, where the Moon would be. There was time enough for them to get the big ship righted and ready to take off. The repairs needed were minor, and the fuel for the rocket was all around them, while the atomic motors were good for at least one more trip. They'd make the Moon, and still have some leeway to maneuver about, or to jump from one crater to another.

Men had struggled with electricity and tamed it before they knew what it was. They'd been fighting gravity for millenia, whenever they did work, and still knew nothing about it, really. They knew nothing about their own minds and the minds of the larger groups being studied in mob psychology, beyond a hint and a suggestion. Men somehow always had to beat down the opposing forces and only learn what they were after the battle was won.

It didn't matter what had been doing it. Maybe they'd never know. Or maybe they'd learn as soon as it was finally overcome. All they had to do was fix it so they couldn't lose.

In another year, the third rocket would go up. This time two men would be watching for it from the Moon—men in a worn space-ship, who'd spent months baking out supplies of water from gypsum for fuel. Bill and Wollen would be ready. They'd ferry the fuel to wherever the next ship landed, and the new ship could head back for Earth less than a day after it touched the Moon.

That wouldn't leave time enough for the records to be changed and old memories replaced with false ones.

Bill grinned to himself. So he'd be a hero, after all, with his supposed-death probably explained as a cover-up for his initial flight. They'd find some way to explain it all, of course.

He shouldered another load of hydroponic tanks to replace those Wollen had left on the Moon, and his face sobered. It would take more than heroism. It would take men too stubborn to have good sense.

"Pumpkins!" he said with a new depth of feeling. "Tomatoes!"

He carried the tanks into the ship and began bolting them down, ready for an early planting.

THE FENCE

BY CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

There are two sides to ony fence, even an invisible one. But con you be sure which is really the inside?

Illustrated by GARI

He came down the stairway into the hushed sanctuary of the lounge and stood for a moment to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the perpetual twilight of the place.

A robot waiter went past, tall glasses balanced on the tray.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Craig," he said.

"How are you, Herman?" asked Craig.

"Will you wish something, sir?"

"No, thank you," said Craig. "I'm going out directly."

Herman left. Craig crossed the room and he walked almost on tiptoe. He realized now, for the first time, that be almost always walked on tiptoe here. The only noise that ever was allowed was a cough and even then it must be a cough that was most discreet. To have spoken to anyone within the confines of the lounge would have been high treason.

Tbe ticker stood in one corner of the room and, in keeping with the place, it was an almost silent ticker. The tape came out and went into a basket, but the basket was well watched and often emptied and the tape never, never spilled out on the carpet.

He picked up the strand of tape and ran it througb his fingers, bending low to read the cbaracters, backing through the alphabet until he came to C and then he went more slowly.

Cox, 108½; Cotton, 97; Colfield, 92; Cratchfield, 111¼; Craig, 75 . . .

Craig, 75!

It had been 78 yesterday and 81 the day before and 83 the day before that. A month ago it had been 96½ and a year ago 120.

He stood with the tape in his band and looked out over the room. The place seemed, at first glance, to be deserted. But as he looked, he saw them. There was a bald head peeking over the back of one chair and over the back of another rose a telltale trail of smoke from an invisible cigar. There was one who sat facing Craig, but be seemed so much a part of tbe chair that at first he seemed invislble. He sat quietly, with hls gleaming black shoes and wbite shirt front and the folded paper beld stlffly before him.

Craig turned his bead slowly and saw, with a sinking feeling, that there was someone in his chair, just three removed from the right wing of the fireplace. A month ago it would not have happened, a year ago it would have been unthinkable. Hls personal satisfaction had been high, then.

But they knew that he was slipping. They had seen the tape and talked about it. And they felt contempt for him despite their mealy mouths.

"Poor Craig," they had said to one another. "Such a decent chap. And so young, too."

They would bave been consoling.

"He'll come out of it," they'd said. "It's just temporary."

And they had been quite smug about it, no doubt, sure that it was the sort of thing that would never happen to any one of them.

The counselor was kind and helpful and Craig could see at a glance that he was a man well satisfied and that he liked his work.

"Seventy-five," he said. "That is not good, is it, Mr. Craig?"

"No, it's not," said Craig.

"You are engaged in something?" asked the counselor and he simpered just a little, a professional, polished simper that said he knew that Craig was, of course, but he had to ask.

"History," said Craig.

"Oh," said the counselor. "A most engaging subject. I have known a number of gentlemen who were quite wrapped up in history."

"I specialize," said Craig. "One acre."

"Acre?" asked the counselor, not a little puzzled. "I'm not quite sure . . ."

"The history of one acre," Craig told him. "Trace it back, you know, with a temporal viewer. Hour to hour, day to day. Record in detail, and with appropriate comment and deduction, everything that transpired upon the acre."

"Most novel," said the counselor. "I've never heard of it before."

"You do some screwy things," said Craig.

"Screwy?"

"Well, you strive for effect. You try to be spectacular, but spectacular in a scholarly way, if you understand."

"Yes, I am sure I do," the counselor said, "and yet it seems to me that the study of one acre of the Earth's surface is quite legitimate. There have been others who have limited their studies. There have been histories of families and of cities and of certain rather obscure causes and of the development and evolution of such commonplace things as teapots and coffee cups and antimacassars and such like."

"Yes," said Craig, "that is exactly what I thought."

"Tell me, Mr. Craig," asked the counselor, "have you run across anything spectacular on your . . . ah, acre?"

"I have traced the growth of trees," said Craig. "Backwards, you know. From decaying giants to saplings, from saplings to seed. It is quite a trick, this backward tracing. It is a bit confusing, but soon you get used to it. I swear you finally get so that you think in reverse. And then, of course, I have kept a record of birds' nests and the birds themselves. There's one old lame robin that was quite a character. And flowers, naturally. And the action of the elements on boulders and soil. And weather. I have a fine record of

the weather over several thousand years."

"Most interesting," said the counselor.

"There was a murder, too," said Craig, "but it happened just outside the boundary line, so I can't actually include it in the study. The murderer, however, did run across the acre after he committed the deed."

"A murder, Mr. Craig?"

"Exactly," said Craig. "One man killed another, you understand."

"How ghastly," said the counselor.

"I suppose it would be," admitted Craig. "But it was done, you know. The records are filled with murders."

"Anything else?"

"Not yet," said Craig, "although I have some hope. I found some old foundations."

"Buildings?"

"Yes, of buildings. Go back far enough and I'm bound to find the buildings before they went to ruin. That might be interesting. There might be people in them. One of the foundations looked like a residence. Had what appeared to be the footing for a fireplace."

"You might hurry it up a bit," suggested the counselor. "Get there a little faster. People are most interesting."

Craig shook his head. "To make the study valid, I must record in detail. I can't slight the detail to get what's interesting."

The counselor managed to look sorrowful.

"With such an interesting project," he said, "I can't understand why your rating should go down."

"I realized," said Craig, "that no one would care. I would spend years at the study and I would publish my findings and I would give copies to my friends and acquaintances and they would thank me and put the book up on the shelf and never take it down again. I would deposit copies in libraries and you know yourself that no one ever goes to libraries. The only one who would ever read the thing would be myself."

"Surely, Mr. Craig," comforted the counselor, "there are other men who have found themselves in a like position. And they have managed to remain relatively happy and contented."

"That is what I've told myself," said Craig, "but it doesn't work for me."

"We could go into many of the closer aspects of the case," said the counselor, "but I think we should leave that until some future time if it proves necessary. We'll just hit the high

points now. Tell me, Mr. Craig, are you fairly well convinced that you cannot continue to be happy with your acre?"

"Yes," said Craig. "I am."

"Not conceding for a moment," said the counselor, with dogged determination, "that your statement to that effect closes our avenue of investigation in that direction, tell me this: Have you considered an alternative?"

"An alternative?"

"Why, certainly. Some other line of work that might prove happier. I have counselled a number of gentlemen who changed their line of work and it has proved for the best."

"No," said Craig. "I haven't the least idea what I might go into."

"There are a number of openings," said the counselor. "Almost anything you wish. There's snail watching, for example."

"No," said Craig.

"Or stamp collecting," said the counselor. "Or knitting. A lot of gentlemen knit and find it very soothing."

"I don't want to knit," said Craig.

"You could make money."

"What for?" asked Craig.

"Well, now," the counselor said, "that is something I've often wondered, too. There's no need of it, really. All you have to do to get money is go to a bank and ask for some of it. But there are men who actually set out to make money and, if you ask me, they use some rather shady methods. But be that as it may, they seem to get a great deal of satisfaction doing it."

"What do they do with it once they get it?" asked Craig.

"I wouldn't know," the counselor told him. "One man buried it and then forgot where he buried it and he remained happy the rest of his life running around with a lantern and a shovel looking for it."

"Why the lantern?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that. He never hunted it in daylight. He hunted in the night."

"Did he ever find it?"

"Come to think of it," the counselor said, "I don't believe he did."

"I don't think," said Craig, "that I'd care for making money."

"You might join a club."

"I belong to a club," said Craig. "A very fine old club. One of the very finest.. Some of the best names and its history runs back to . . ."

"That's not the kind of club I mean," the counselor said. "I mean a group of persons who work for something or who have special interests in common and band themselves together for the

better enjoyment of those mutual interests."

"I doubt," said Craig, "that a club would be the answer."

"You might get married," the counselor suggested.

"What! You mean to one woman?"

"That is what I mean."

"And raise a bunch of kids?"

"Many men have done it," said the counselor. "They have been quite satisfied."

"It seems," said Craig, "on the face of it, just a bit obscene."

"There are many other possibilities," the counselor told him. "I can just run through a partial list of them and see if there is anything you might care to think about."

Craig shook his head. "Some other time," he said. "I'll come back again. I want to mull it over."

"You're absolutely sure that you're sour on history?" asked the counselor. "I'd rather steer you back to that than interest you in an alternative."

"I'm sour on it," said Craig. "I shudder when I think of it."

"You could take a vacation," suggested the counselor. "You could freeze your personal satisfaction rating until you returned. Maybe then you could boost it up again."

"I think," said Craig, "that to start with I'll take a little walk."

"A walk," the counselor told him, "is very often helpful."

"What do I owe you?" Craig asked.

"A hundred," the counselor said. "But it's immaterial to me if you pay or not."

"I know," said Craig. "You work for the love of it."

The man sat on the shore of the little pond and leaned back against a tree. He smoked while he kept an eye on the fishpole stuck into the ground beside him. Close at hand was an unpretentious jug made of earthenware.

He looked up and saw Craig.

"Come on, friend," he said. "Sit down and rest yourself."

Craig came and sat. He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"The sun's a little warm," he said.

"Cool here," said the man. "I fish or loaf around when the sun is high. When the sun goes down I go and hoe my garden."

"Flowers," said Craig. "Now there's an idea. I've often thought it would be fun to raise a garden full of flowers."

"Not flowers," the man said. "Vegetables. I eat them."

"You mean you work to get the things you eat?"

"Uh-huh," said the man. "I

spade the ground and rake it to prepare the seed bed. Then I plant the seeds and watch them sprout and grow. I tend the garden and I harvest it. I get enough to eat."

"It must be a lot of work."

"I take it easy," said the man. "I don't let it worry me."

"You could get a robot," Craig told him.

"Yeah, I guess I could. But I don't hold with such contraptions. It would make me nervous."

The cork went under and he made a grab for the pole, but he was too late. The book came up empty.

"Missed that one," he said placidly. "Miss a lot of them. Don't pay enough attention."

He swung in the hook and baited it with a worm from the can that stood beside him.

"Might have been a turtle," he said. "Turtles are hell on bait."

He swung the tackle out again, stuck the pole back into the ground and settled back against the tree.

"I grow a little extra corn," he said, "and run a batch of moon when my stock is running low. The house ain't much to look at, but it's comfortable. I got a dog and two cats and I fuss my neighbors."

"Fuss your neighbors?"

"Sure," the man said. "They all think that I am nuts."

He picked up the jug, uncorked it and handed it to Craig. Craig took a drink, prepared for the worst. It wasn't bad at all.

"Took a little extra care with that batch," the man said. "It really pays to do that if you have the time."

"Tell me," said Craig, "Are you satisfied?"

"Sure," the man said.

"You must have a nice P.S.," said Craig.

"P.X.?"

"No. P.S. Personal satisfaction rating."

The man shook his head. "I ain't got one of them," he said.

Craig was aghast. "But you have to have!"

"You talk just like that other fellow," said the man. "He was around a while ago. Told me about this P.S. business, but I thought he said P.X. Told me I had to have one. Took it awful hard when I said I wouldn't do it."

"Everyone has a P.S.," said Craig.

"Everyone but me," said the man. "That's what the other fellow said, too. He was some upset about it. Practically read me out of the human race."

He looked sharply at Craig. "Son," he said, "you got troubles on your mind."

Craig nodded.

"Lots of folks have troubles," said the man, "only they don't know it. And you can't start to lick your troubles until you see and recognize them. Things are all upset. No one's living right. There is something wrong."

"My P.S. is way off," said Craig. "I've lost all interest. I know there's something wrong. I can sense it, but I can't put my finger on it."

"They get things given to them," said the man. "They could live the life of Riley and not do a tap of work. They could get food and shelter and clothing and all the luxuries that they want by just asking for them. You want money, so you go to a bank and the bank gives you all you need. You go to a shop and buy a thing and the shopkeeper don't give a tinker's damn if you pay or not. Becsuse, you see, it didn't cost him nothing. He got it given to him. He doesn't have to work for a living. He ain't keeping shop, really. He's just playing at it, like kids would play at keeping store. And there's other people who play at all sorts of other things. They do it to keep from dying of boredom. They wouldn't have to do it. And this P.S. business you talk about is just another play-mechanism, a way of keeping score, a sort of social pressure to keep you on your toes when there is no real reason on all of God's green earth that you should be on your toes. It's meant to keep you happy by giving you something to work for. A high P.S. means high social standing and a satisfied ego. It's clever and ingenious, but it's just playing, too."

Craig stared at the man. "A play world," he said. "You've hit it on the head. That's what it really is."

The man chuckled. "You never thought of it before," he said. "That's the trouble. No one ever thinks. Everyone is so busy trying to convince himself that he's happy and important that he never stops to think. Let me tell you this, son: No man ever is important if he tries to make himself important. It's when he forgets that he's important that he really is important.

"Me," be said. "I have lots of time to think."

"I never thought of it," said Craig, "in just that way before."

"We have no economic worth," the man said. "There's not any of us making our own way. There's not a single one of us worth the energy it would take to kill us.

"Except me," he said. "I raise my own eating and I catch some fish and I snare some rabbits and I make a batch of drinking likker whenever I run out."

"I always thought of our way of life," said Craig, "as the final phase in economic development. That's what they teach the kids. Man has finally achieved economic independence. There is no government and there is no economic fabric. You get all you need as a matter of a hereditary right, a common right. You are free to do anything you want to do and you try to live a worthwhile life."

"Son," said the man, "you had breakfast this morning and you had lunch this noon before you took your walk. You'll eat dinner tonight and you'll have a drink or two. Tomorrow you'll get a new shirt or a pair of shoes and there will be some equipment that you'll need to carry on your work."

"That's right," said Craig.

"What I want to know," said the man, "is where did all that stuff come from? The shirt or the pair of shoes might have been made by someone who likes to make shirts and shoes. The food was cooked either by robots or by someone who likes to cook, and the drawing set or the typewriter or the power tools that you use might have been made hy someone who likes to mess around making stuff like that. But before the typewriter was a typewriter, it was metal in the ground, the food was grown, the clothes came from one of several raw materials. Tell me: who grew the raw materials, who dug and smelted the ore?"

"I don't know," said Craig. "I never thought of that."

"We're *kept*," said the man. "Someone is keeping us. Me, I won't be kept."

He pulled in the tackle and twirled the pole to wrap the line around it.

"Sun is getting down a bit," he said. "I got to go and hoe."

"It was good talking to you," said Craig, getting up.

"Nice path over that way," said the man, pointing. "Good walking. Lots of flowers and it's shaded, so it'll be nice and cool. If you go far enough, you'll reach an art gallery." He looked at Craig. "You're interested in art?"

"Yes," said Craig. "But I didn't know there was a gallery anywhere around."

"Well, there is," said the man. "Good paintings. Some wood statuary that is better than average. A few pieces of good jade. Go there myself when I have the time."

"Well, thanks," said Craig.

"Funny looking building," the man said. "Group of buildings, really. Architect who designed them was crazier than a coot, but don't let it prejudice you. The stuff is really good."

"There's plenty of time," said Craig. "I'll drop in and have a look. Thanks for telling me."

The man got up and dusted off his trousers seat.

"If you're late in getting back," he said, "drop in and spend the night. My shack is just across the way. Plenty of grub and there is room for two to sleep."

"Thank you," said Craig. "I may do it."

He had no intention of accepting the offer.

The man held out his hand. "My name is Sherman," he said. "Glad you came along."

They shook hands.

Sherman went to hoe his garden and Craig walked down the path.

The buildings seemed to be quite close and yet it was hard to make out their lines. It was because of some crazy architectural principle, Craig decided. Sherman had said the architect was crazier than a coot. One time when he looked at them, they looked one way; when he looked again they were different somehow. They were never twice the same.

They were pink until he decided that they weren't pink at all, but were really blue; there were other times when they seemed neither pink nor blue, but a sort of green, although it wasn't really green.

They were beautiful, of course, but it was a disturbing beauty —a brand new sort of beauty. Something, Craig decided, that Sherman's misplaced genius had thought up, although it did seem funny that a place like this could exist without his ever hearing about it. Still, such a thing was understandable when he remembered that everyone was so self-consciously wrapped up in his work that he never paid attention to what anyone else was doing.

There was one way, of course, to find out what it was all about and that was to go and see.

The buildings, he estimated, were no more than a good five minutes' walk across a landscaped meadow that was a thing of beauty in itself.

He started out and walked for fifteen minutes and he did not get there. It seemed, however, that he was viewing the buildings from a slightly different angle, although that was hard to tell, because they refused to stay in place but seemed to be continually shifting and distorting their lines.

It was, of course, no more than an optical illusion.

He started out again.

After another fifteen minutes he was still no closer, although

he could have sworn that he had kept his course headed straight toward the buildings.

It was then that he began to feel the panic.

He stood quite still and considered the situation as sanely as he could and decided there was nothing for it but to try again and this time pay strict attention to what he was doing.

He started out, moving slowly, almost counting his steps as he walked, concentrating fiercely upon keeping each step headed in the right direction.

It was then he discovered he was slipping. It appeared that he was going straight ahead but, as a matter of fact, he was slipping sidewise as he walked. It was just as if there were something smooth and slippery in front of him that translated his forward movement into a sidewise movement without his knowing it. Like a fence, a fence that he couldn't see or sense.

He stopped and the panic that had been gnawing at him broke into cold and terrible fear.

Something flickered in front of him. For a moment it seemed that he saw an eye, one single staring eye, looking straight at him. He stood rigid and the sense of being looked at grew and now it seemed that there were strange shadows on the grass beyond the fence that was invisible. As if someone, or something, that he couldn't see was standing there and looking at him, watching with amusement his efforts to walk through the fence.

He lifted a hand and thrust it out in front of him and there was no fence, but his hand and arm slipped sidewise and did not go forward more than a foot or so.

He felt the kindness, then, the kindness and the pity and the vast superiority.

And he turned and fled.

He hammered on the door and Sherman opened it.

Craig stumbled in and fell into a chair. He looked up at the man he had talked with that afternoon.

"You knew," he said. "You knew and you sent me to find out."

Sherman nodded. "You wouldn't have believed me if I told you."

"What are they?" asked Craig, his words tumbling wildly. "What are they doing there?"

"I don't know what they are," said Sherman.

He walked to the stove and took a lid off a kettle and looked at what was cooking. Whatever it was, it had a hungry smell. Then he walked to the table and took the chimney off an antique

oil lamp, struck a match and lit it.

"I go it simple," he said. "No electricity. No nothing. I hope that you don't mind. Rahbit stew for supper."

He looked at Craig across the smoking lamp and in the flickering light it seemed that his head floated in the air, for the glow of the lamp blotted out his body.

"But what are *they?*" demanded Craig. "What kind of fence ia that? What are they fenced in for?"

."Son," aaid Sherman, "they aren't the ones who are fenced in."

"They aren't . . ."

"It's us," said Sherman. "Can't you see it? *We* are the ones who are fenced in."

"You said this afternoon," said Craig, "that we were kept. You mean they're keeping us?"

Sherman nodded. "That's the way I have it figured. They're keeping us, watching over us, taking care of us. There's nothing that we want that we can't have for the simple asking. They're taking real good care of us."

"But why?"

"I don't know," said Sherman. "A zoo, maybe. A reservation, maybe. A place to preserve the last of a species. They don't mean us any harm."

"I know they don't," said Craig. "I felt them. That's what frightened me."

He sat in the silence of the shack and smelled the cooking rabhit and watched the flicker of the lamp.

"What can we do about it?" he asked.

"That's the thing," said Sherman, "that we have to figure out. Maybe we don't want to do anything at all."

Sherman went to the stove and stirred the rabhit stew.

"You are not the first," he said, "and you will not be the last. There were others hefore you and there will be others like you who'll come along this way, walking off their troubles."

He put the lid hack on the kettle.

"We're watching them," he said, "the hest we can. Trying to find out. They can't keep us fooled and caged forever."

Craig sat in his chair, remembering the kindness and the pity and the vast superiority.

North American Aviatian, Inc., hos designed a "midget" atom pile for college and experimental work. It will be only obout 20 feet in diameter ond eleven feet high. The cost to build it? A mere millian dollors.

THE GOD IN THE BOWL

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

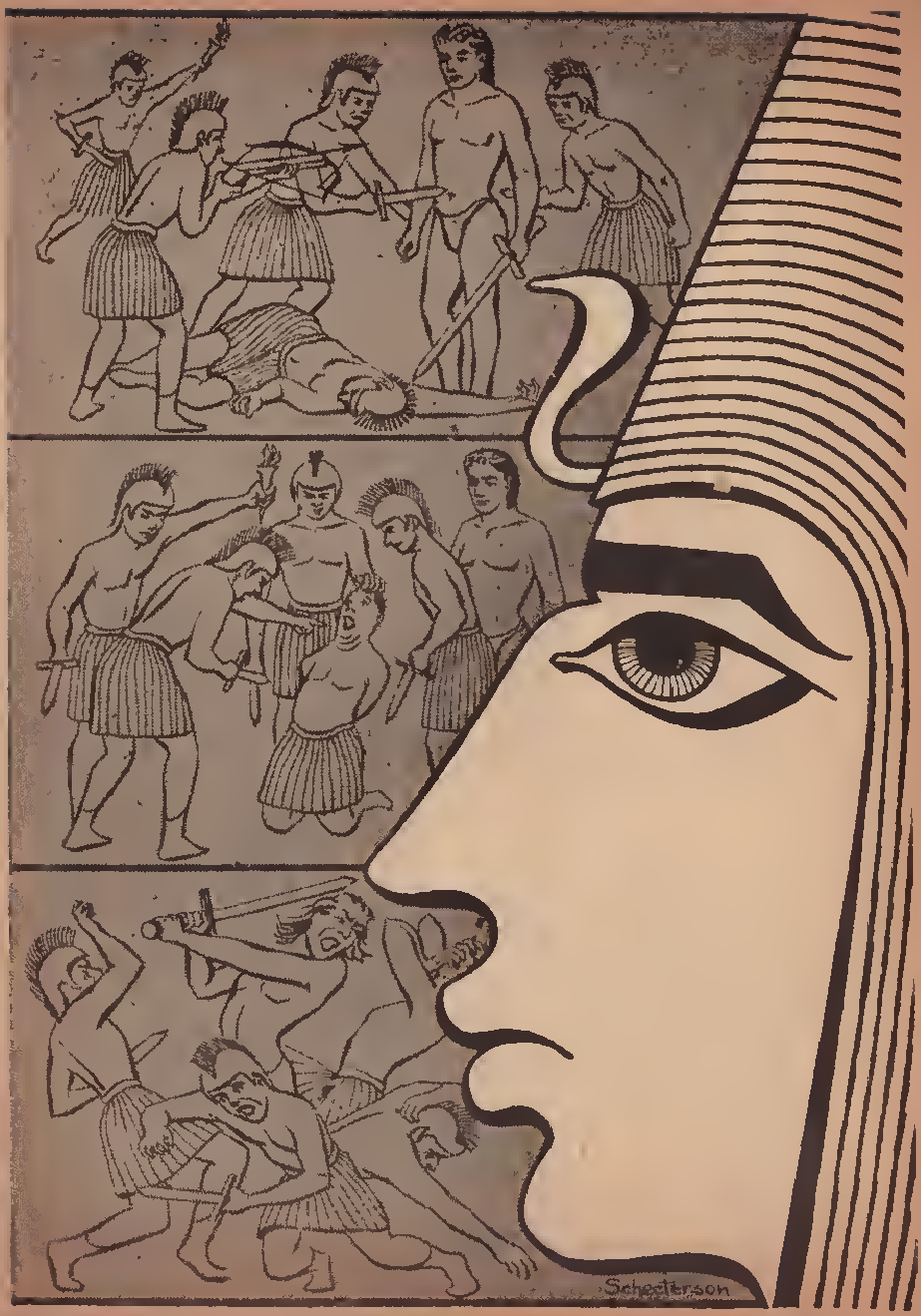
EDITED BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

With the death of Robert E. Howard in 1936 the world lost one of its greatest fantasy adventure writers. Howard had created a world in the remote post where grim and mighty heroes fought against the horrors of wizardry and the strange beasts and gods left over from a still more savage earlier age. It was a rich and complete world, and the heroes were of epic mold. Of these, the greatest was Conan the Cimmerian, who came from the chill Northland to steal and plunder and fight his way up to the throne of one of the greatest of the semi-civilized empires of the time. Perhaps it is outright fantasy, since science says no such world existed; or perhaps, if you'll imagine this on some world of the future where conditions are different from those on Earth, it's as truly science-fiction as many stories are. In either case, **SPACE SCIENCE FICTION** feels the discovery of a hitherto-unpublished story of Howard's Hyperborean hero, Conan the Cimmerian, is an important event. We are happy to bring it to you as our first **SPACE** Special!

Illustrated by SCHECTERSON

NOTE: This is one of the Conan stories that I have dug out of the pile of unsold manuscripts that Robert E. Howard left in the hands of his agent, the late Otis A. Kline, at his lamented death in 1936. This story, like The Tower of the Elephant *and* Rogues in the House, *deals with Conan's larcenous youth. While there is no exact indication of when the tale was written, a holographic note from H. P. Lovecraft (to whom Howard had evidently submitted the story for comment) was clipped to the manuscript. The note was written on the back of a calendar-pad bearing the date "July 1, 1931", from which I judge that this was among the first Conan stories to be composed. The note reads:*

Wandrei and I have read these tales with keen interest & appreciation. Best wishes for their ultimate publication! Dwyer seems to have enjoyed them greatly, too. The climax of "The God in the Bowl" is splendidly vivid! —HPL


Scheetterson

In reworking this tale I have retained the original storyline without change. My alterations comprise: (1) Changing the names of characters where these names too closely resembled each other or those of other characters in the Conan series. (Howard was incorrigibly careless in such matters.) (2) Condensing the dialogue which, especially in the early part of the story, got out of hand. (3) Correcting many minor infelicities and modifying the style, which in places approached that of a contemporary whodunnit, for greater consistency with the other Conan stories.

—L. S. de C.

Orys, the watchman, grasped his crossbow with shaky hands and felt beads of clammy perspiration ooze out upon his skin as he stared at the corpse sprawled on the polished floor before him. It was not pleasant to come upon Death in a lonely place at midnight.

The watchman looked sharply up and down the vast corridor lighted by huge candles set in niches along the walls. Between the niches these walls were covered with black velvet wall-hangings and, between these, hanging shields and crossed weapons of fantastic make were affixed to the walls behind. Here and there, too, stood figures of curious gods—images carven of stone or rare woods, or cast in bronze, iron, or silver—dimly mirrored in the gleaming black floor.

Orys, a simple man, shuddered. Though he had worked here for some months he had never yet become used to the fantastic establishment. Men called this great museum and antique-house, harboring rarities from all over the world, Kallian Podarco's Temple—and now, in the midnight silence, Orys stood in the great hall and stared at the sprawling corpse of the Temple's rich and powerful owner.

Kallian's appearance was now strangely different from what it had been when he rode along the Palian Way in his gilded chariot, massive, arrogant, and domineering, with his dark eyes glinting with magnetic vitality. Men who had hated and feared Kallian Podarco would scarcely have recognized him as he lay like a disintegrated tun of fat, his rich robe half torn from him and his purple tunic awry. His face was blackened, his eyes started from his head, and his tongue lolled from his gaping mouth. His fat hands, glittering with rings, were thrown out as in a futile gesture.

"Why took they not his

rings?" muttered the watchman uneasily. Then he started and glared, the short hairs prickling at the nape of his neck. Through the dark hangings that masked one of the many doorways came a figure.

Orys saw a tall, powerfully-built youth, naked but for a loincloth and sandals strapped high about his ankles, with a skin burned brown as by the sun of the wastelands and blue eyes smoldering from under a mop of disorderly black hair. A long sword in a leather scabbard hung from his girdle.

Orys ran his eyes nervously over the broad shoulders, massive chest, and heavy arms. His skin crawled as a single look at the broad-browed features told him that the man was no Nemedian. He fingered his crossbow, half minded to drive a bolt through the stranger's body without parley, yet fearful of what might happen if he failed to kill with the first shot.

The stranger looked, more in curiosity than surprise, at the body on the floor. Orys drew a deep breath and asked, "Why killed you him?"

The other shook his tousled head. "I slew him not," he answered, speaking Nemedian with a barbarous accent. "Who is he?"

"Kallian Podarco," replied Orys, edging back.

A flicker of interest showed in the moody blue eyes. "The proprietor?"

"Aye." Orys had edged his way to the wall. Now he grasped a thick velvet rope that hung there and jerked it violently.

From the street outside sounded the piercing clang of the bell that hung before all shops and other establishments to summon the watch. The stranger started.

"Why did you that?" he asked. "It will fetch the watchman!"

"I am the watchman, knave!" answered Orys, bracing his courage. "Stand where you are. Move not or I'll loose a bolt through you!"

His finger touched the trigger of his arbalest; the wicked square head of the quarrel pointed straight for the other's broad breast. The stranger scowled, his dark face lowering. He showed no fear, but seemed hesitant whether to obey the command or chance a sudden break. Orys licked his lips, his blood running cold as he saw caution struggle with lethal intent in the foreigner's features.

Then he heard a door crash open and a babble of voices. As half a dozen men entered the hall he drew a breath of grateful amazement, while the stranger

tensed and glared with the worried look of a beast of prey interrupted in its hunt by a larger one. All but one of the newcomers wore the scarlet tunic of the prefectural guard of the city of Numalia. They were girt with short stabbing swords and carried bills—long-shafted weapons, half pike, half ax.

"What devil's work is this?" exclaimed the foremost man, whose cold gray eyes and lean features, no less than his sober civilian garments, set him apart from his burly companions.

"Thank Mitra, Lord Hymetrio!" cried Orys. "Fortune is assuredly with me tonight. I had no hope that the watch would answer the summons so swiftly —or that you would be among them!"

"I was making the rounds with Diomus," answered Hymetrio. "We were but passing the temple when the watch-bell clanged. But who is this? *Ishtar!* The master of the Temple himself!"

"None other," said Orys, "and foully murdered. It is my duty, you know, to walk about the building all night, because of the immense wealth stored here. Kallian Podarco had rich patrons—scholars, princes, and wealthy collectors. Well, but a few minutes ago I tried the door that opens on the portico and found it only bolted, not locked. The door has a bolt, which works from either side, and also a great lock, which can be worked only from without. Only Kallian Podarco had a key to that, the very key that now hangs from his girdle.

"I knew something was amiss, for Kallian always locked the door with the great lock when he closed the Temple, and I had not seen him return since he left at close of day for his villa in the suburbs. With my key to the bolt I entered and found the body lying as you see it."

"So." Hymetrio's keen eyes swept the stranger. "And who is this?"

"Why, the murderer!" cried Orys. "He came through yonder door—some sort of northern barbarian, perhaps a Hyperborean."

Hymetrio asked the stranger, "Who are you?"

"I am Conan, a Cimmerian."

"Did you slay this man?"

The Cimmerian shook his head.

"Answer me!" snapped the questioner.

An angry look rose in the blue eyes. "I am no dog, to be spoken to thus!"

"Oh! An impudent knave!" declared Hymetrio's companion, a big man wearing the silver fillet and gilded cuirass of the

municipal prefect. "An independent cur! I'll soon knock the insolence out of him. You, rogue, speak up! Why slew you—"

"A moment, Diomus," commanded Hymetrio, then turned to Conan. "Fellow, I am the president of the Inquisitorial Council of the city of Numalia. It is our boast that with us the innocent have naught to fear, the guilty naught to hope for. Therefore you had best tell why you are here, and if you are not the murderer, prove it."

The Cimmerian hesitated. His bearing showed no fear, but rather a slight bewilderment, as if baffled by the mysterious complexities of civilized urban life.

"While he thinks it over," said Hymetrio, turning to Orys, "tell me: Saw you Kallian Podarco leave the Temple this evening?"

"No, my lord, but he is usually gone when I come to begin my sentry-duty. The great door was bolted and locked."

"Could he have entered the building again without your seeing him?"

"Mayhap; but I should have heard the wheels of his chariot on the cobbles. And the door was locked on the outside—I try them all from time to time through the night—until perhaps half an hour gone, when I found it unlocked."

"You heard no cry or sound of struggle?"

"No, sir. But that's not strange, for the walls of the Temple are so thick that no sound can pass them."

The burly prefect interrupted the dialogue to complain, "Why all this labor of questions and speculations? There stands our man; let me but take him to the Courts of Justice and I'll warrant you to wring a confession of his crime from him if I must beat his every bone of him to powder!"

Hymetrio looked at the barbarian. "You heard the prefect. What have you to say?"

"That any man who touches me shall soon be greeting his ancestors in Hell," grated the Cimmerian, showing his powerful teeth.

"Why then came you here, if not to slay?"

"I came to steal."

"To steal what?"

Conan hesitated. "Food."

"You lie!" barked the inquisitor. "You knew there was no food here. Tell the truth or—"

The Cimmerian laid his hand on his sword-hilt, a gesture as fraught with menace as the baring of a tiger's fangs. "Save your bullying for the cowards who fear you. I'm no city-bred Nemedian to cringe before your

hired dogs. I have slain better men than you for less."

Diomus, who had opened his mouth as if to bellow an order, closed it again. The watchmen fidgeted with their bills, glancing at Hymetrio, and speechless at hearing the all-powerful police thus defied. Orys glanced from one to the other, wondering what was going on in the keen brain behind Hymetrio's hawk-face. Among the Numalians the inquisitor bore the repute of a just if merciless judge. Perhaps the magistrate feared to arouse the barbaric frenzy of the Cimmerian, or perhaps there was an honest doubt in his mind.

He spoke. "I have not accused you of slaying Kallian, but you must admit that appearances are against you. How came you into the Temple?"

Conan answered grudgingly. "I hid in the shadows of the warehouse behind this building. When this dog," he jerked a thumb at Orys, "passed around the corner, I ran to the wall and scaled it—"

"A lie!" broke in Orys. "No man could climb that straight wall!"

"Have you never seen a Cimmerian scale a sheer cliff?" said Hymetrio. "I am conducting this inquiry. Go on, Conan."

"The wall was easy to climb, being decorated with carvings," continued the Cimmerian. "I gained the roof and found the trap-door to be fastened with an iron bolt that passed through it and was locked within. I hewed the bolt in twain—"

Orys, remembering the thickness of the bolt, gasped and moved back from the barbarian, who scowled abstractedly at him and continued, "I passed through the trap-door into an upper chamber, and thence came to the stair—"

"How knew you where the stair was? Only trusted servants and patrons of Kallian were allowed in the upper rooms."

Conan stared in stubborn silence until Hymetrio said, "Well, what did you then?"

"As I came straight down into the chamber beyond yonder curtained door, I heard the opening of another portal. When I looked through the hangings I saw this loon standing over the corpse."

"Why did you come from your hiding-place?"

"Because at first I deemed him another thief, come to steal that which—" The Cimmerian checked himself.

"—That which you yourself had come after!" finished Hymetrio with a smile of cold satisfaction. "As you did not tarry above, where the richest goods

are, you must have been sent by some one who knows the Temple well, to steal some special thing!"

"Or to slay Kallian!" crled Diomus. "Seize him, men! I'll have a confession—"

With a foreign curse Conan leaped back and whipped out his sword with a viciousness that made the blade hum.

"Back, if you value your llves!" he snarled. "Because you dare torture shop-keepers and harlots, think not to lay your fat paws on a hillman! Fumble with your bow, watchman, and I'll burst your guts with my heel!"

"Wait!" said Hymetrio. "Call off your dogs, Diomus. I am still not convinced that this is the slayer." Hymetrio leaned toward Diomus and whispered something that Orys could not catch, but which he suspected of being a plan for tricking Conan into parting with his sword. He saw that Conan noticed the interchange, too.

Diomus called his guardsmen back and Hymetrio said to Conan, "Give me your sword, as a surety that you will not attack us."

"Take it if you can!"

The inquisitor shrugged "Very well, but make no attempt to escape. Men with crossbows guard the house outside." He turned to the corpse. "Strange. Why strangle him when a sword-stroke is quicker and surer?" He felt the body with experienced hands. "Dead at least the half of an hour. If Conan speaks truth he could hardly have slain the man ere Orys entered." He brooded over the dead man's throat, which had been crushed to a pulp of purplish flesh. The head sagged on splintered vertebrae. "And what terrible force could so have crushed his neck? One would think he had been throttled by one of the great man-apes of the eastern mountains."

Hymetrio rose and walked to the nearest door into the corridor. "Here is a bust knocked from its stand, and the floor is scratched, and the hangings are pulled awry. Perhaps the attack upon Kallian began in this room. We shall look into it—"

Chariot-wheels rattled in the street, then stopped.

"Diomus!" snapped the magistrate. "Send two men to fetch the driver of that chariot."

"Sir," said Orys, who was familiar with the local street-noises, "from the sound I should say that it stopped before Promero's house, beyond the silk-merchant's shop."

"Who is Promero?"

"Kallian Podarco's chief clerk."

"Fetch him with the driver," said Hymetrio.

Two guardsmen clomped away. Hymetrio resumed his study of the body. Diomus, Orya, and the remaining policemen watched Conan, who atood sword in hand like a bronze statue of brooding menace. Presently sandals slapped and the two guards reëntered with a strong dark man in the leather helmet and long tunic of a charioteer, carrying a whip, and a small rabbity-looking person typical of that class which, risen from the ranks of artisans, supplies right-hand men for rich merchants and traders. The small man recoiled with a cry from the bulk on the floor.

"Oh, I knew evil would come of this!" he wailed.

Hymetrio said, "You are Promero, I suppose. And you?"

"Enaros," said the other newcomer. "Kallian Podarco's charioteer."

Hymetrio observed, "You seem not overly moved at the sight of your master's corpse."

The dark eyes flashed. "Why should I be? Some one has but done that which I and many of his servants long wished to do but dared not."

"Did you know your master was coming here tonight?"

"Nay. I brought the chariot to the Temple this evening as usual. He entered and I drove towards his villa, but ere we reached the Palian Way he ordered me to turn back, seeming much agitated."

"Back to the Temple?"

"No, to Promero's house, where he dismissed me, commanding me to return for him shortly after midnight."

"What did you then?"

"I returned to the slave quarters until it was time to fetch him. Then I drove straight here, where your men seized me."

"Know you why Kallian visited Promero?"

"He spoke not of his business to his slaves."

Hymetrio turned to Promero. "What know you of this?"

"Naught." The clerk's teeth chattered as he spoke.

"Did Kallian come to your house as the charioteer avers?"

"Aye, sir."

"Why?"

"I know not! I know nothing!" Promero's voice became hysterical.

"Make him talk, Diomus," said Hymetrio. Diomus nodded to one of his men who, grinning savagely, moved toward the two captives. He thrust his head forward, growling. "D'you know me?"

The charioteer answered sullenly. "You're Bostoumo, who

gouged out a girl's eye in the Court of Justice when she would not incriminate her lover."

The guardsman's face purpled and the veins in his thick neck swelled as he seized the clerk by the collar of his tunic and twisted it until the man was half strangled. He bellowed, "Speak up, rat! Answer the inquisitor!"

"Oh, Mitra, mercy!" screamed the wretch. "I swear—"

Bostoumo gave him a terrific slap on each side of the face, then flung him to the floor and kicked him with vicious accuracy.

"Mercy!" moaned the victim. "I'll tell—I'll tell all—"

"Get up, cur!" roared Bostoumo.

Diomus shot a glance at Conan to see if he were properly impressed. The Cimmerian merely spat contemptuously. The clerk dragged himself to his feet, whimpering.

"Kallian came to my house soon after I arrived—I left the Temple when he did—and sent his chariot away. He threatened me with dismissal if I ever spoke of it. I'm a poor man, my lords, without friends or favor. Without my position with him I shall starve."

"What is that to me?" snapped Hymetrio. "How long remained he with you?"

"Until perhaps half an hour before midnight. Then he went, saying that he was going to the Temple, and would return later."

"What did he mean to do there?"

Promero hesitated, but a shuddering glance at the grinning Bostoumo flexing his huge fist soon opened his lips. "He wished to examine something in the Temple."

"Why alone, and in secret?"

"Because the thing was not his. It arrived at dawn in a caravan from the south. The men of the caravan knew nothing of it save that it had been placed with them by men of a caravan from Stygia, and was meant for Caranthes of Hanumar, priest of Ibis. The master of the caravan had been paid by these men to deliver the thing directly to Caranthes, but the rascal wished to proceed straight to Aquilonia by the road on which Hanumar does not lie. So he asked if he might leave it in the Temple until Caranthes could send for it.

"Kallian assented and told him that he himself would send a servant to inform Caranthes. But after the men had gone and I spoke of the runner, Kallian forbade me to send him. He sat brooding over what the men had left."

"And what was that?"

"A sort of sarcophagus, such

as is found in ancient Stygian tombs. But this one was round, like a covered metal bowl. Its composition was like copper, but harder, and it was carved with hieroglyphs like those on ancient menhirs in southern Stygia. The lid was made fast by copper-like bands."

"What was in it?"

"The caravan-men did not know. They said only that those who gave it to them told them that it was a priceless relic found among the tombs far beneath the pyramids and sent to Caranthes because of the love which the sender bore the priest of Ibis. Kallian Podarco believed that it contained the diadem of the giant-kings, of the people who dwelt in that dark land before the ancestors of the Stygians came there. He showed me a design carved upon the lid, which he swore had the shape of the diadem which legend tells the monster-kings wore.

"He was determined to open the bowl to see what it contained. He became like one mad when he thought of the fabled diadem, set with many strange jewels known only to that ancient race, a single one of which would be worth more than all the jewels of the modern world.

"I warned him against it; but shortly before midnight he went to the Temple, hiding in the shadows until the watchman had passed to the other side of the building, then letting himself in with his belt-key. I watched him from the shadows of the silk shop until he entered, then returned to my own house. If anything of great value were in the bowl he intended hiding it elsewhere in the Temple and slipping out again. Then on the morrow he would raise a great outcry, saying that thieves had broken into his house and stolen Caranthes' property. None should know of his prowlings but the charioteer and I, and neither of us would speak."

"But the watchman?" objected Hymetrio.

"Kallian did not intend to be seen by him. He planned to have him crucified as an accomplice of the thieves."

Orys gulped as his employer's duplicity penetrated his simple mind.

"Where is this sarcophagus?" asked Hymetrio. Promero pointed, and the inquisitor grunted. "So! The very room where Kallian was attacked."

Promero twisted his thin trembling hands. "Why should a Stygian send Caranthes a gift? Ancient gods and queer mummies have come up the caravan roads before, but who loves the priest of Ibis so well in Stygia

where they still worship the arch-demon Set, the snake-god who coils among the tombs in the darkness? The god Ibis has fought Set since the dawn of the earth, and Caranthes has fought Set's priests all his life. Something dark is hidden here."

Hymetrio said: "Show us this sarcophagus."

Hesitantly, Promero led the way. All followed, including Conan, apparently heedless of the guardsmen's wary glances. They passed through the torn hangings into a dimly-lit room whose walls were lined with fantastic images, gods of strange lands and far peoples. Promero cried out:

"Look! The bowl! Open, and empty!"

In the center of the room stood a bulging black cylindrical vessel, about four feet high and a little less in maximum diameter. The heavy carven lid lay on the floor, and beside it a hammer and chisel. Hymetrio looked inside, puzzled an instant over the dim hieroglyphs, and turned to Conan, saying:

"Is this what you came to steal?"

The barbarian shook his head. "How could one man bear it away?"

"The bands were cut with this chisel," mused Hymetrio. "And in haste: there are marks where misstrokes of the hammer dented the metal. No doubt Kallian opened the bowl, and then the murderer sprang out of hiding upon him."

"A grisly thing," shuddered the clerk. "Too ancient to be holy. Look at that metal: harder than Aquilonian steel, yet corroded away in spots. And there on the lid!"

Hymetrio bent closer to the carven design. "I should say it depicted a crown of some sort."

"No! I warned Kallian, but he would not believe me. It is the scaled serpent coiled with its tail in its mouth—the sign of Set, the Old Serpent, the god of the Stygians! The bowl is a relic of a time when Set walked the earth in the form of a man. Perhaps the race that sprang from his loins laid the bones of their kings away in such cases as this!"

"And so these moldering bones rose up, strangled Kallian Podarco, and walked away?"

"What man could lie in that bowl?" whispered the clerk, eyes wide.

Hymetrio swore. "A man could sit in it, were he doubled up as the Picts do with their dead for burial. If Conan be not the culprit, the slayer is still about. Diomus and Orys and you three prisoners, remain here while the rest of you search the

house. The murderer could only have escaped by the way Conan came in, in which case the barbarian would have seen bim."

"I saw no one but this dog," growled Conan, indicating Orys.

"Of course not, because you're the guilty one," said Diomus. "We shall search, but we shall find nobody. And remember the law, my black-baired savage: For slaying an artisan you go to the mines; a tradesman, you hang; a gentleman, you burn!"

Conan bared his teeth for answer. The men began their search; the listeners in the chamber heard them stamping about, moving objects, opening doors, and calling to one another.

"Conan," said Hymetrio, "you know what happens if they find no one."

"I slew him not," snarled the Cimmerian. "If he had sought to hinder me I should have split his skull, but I saw him not until I sighted bis corpse."

"Someone sent you here to steal, at least, and by your silence you incriminate yourself in this manslaying as well. Your being here alone is enough to send you to the mines, but if you tell the whole tale you may save yourself from tbe stake."

"Well," answered the barbarian grudgingly, "I came here to steal the diamond Zamorian goblet. It is kept in yonder room, in a niche in the floor under a copper Sbemitish god."

"He speaks truth there," said Promero. "I thought not six men knew of that hiding place."

Hymetrio smiled coldly. "And if you had secured it, would you have really given it to him who hired you?"

"I keep my word."

"Who sent you hither?" asked Hymetrio, but Conan went into a sullen silence.

The guards straggled back. "There's no man hiding in this house," tbey said. "We have ransacked the place. We found the trap-door with the bolt hewn in half, through which the barbarian came. A man escaping that way would have been seen by our guards, and be would bave had to stack furniture to reach it from below, whicb has not been done."

Another said, "I think I saw the rope used by the strangler."

"Where, fool?" cried Diomus quickly.

"In the chamber adjoining this one: a thick black cable hanging down from the carven top of a marble pillar. I couldn't reach it."

He led the way into a room filled with marble statuary and pointed to a tall column, then balted staring. "It's gone!"

"It was never there," snorted Diomus.

"By Mitra, it was! Coiled about the pillar above those carven leaves."

"Too high for a man to reach," said Hymetrio.

"A man-ape from the eastern mountains could, sir," said the man. "Or a Cimmerian; there's little difference."

"Possibly. But Conan has been under my sight all the time and so could not have removed this rope since you saw it. I am convinced that he is not the slayer, who is still biding in some nook bereabouts. If we cannot find him we shall have to blame the barbarian, to satisfy justice, but—where's Promero?"

They had straggled back to the silent body in the corridor. Diomus bellowed for Promero, who came from the room in which stood the empty bowl, face white and hands shaking.

"What now, man?" said Hymetrio.

Promero chattered, "I have found a symbol on the bottom of the bowl; no ancient hieroglyphic, but freshly carved! The mark of Thoth-Amon, the Stygian sorcerer, Caranthes' deadly foe! He must have found the bowl in some grisly cavern below the haunted pyramids! The gods of old times did not die as men die—they fell into long slumbers and their worsbippers locked them in sarcophagi that no alien hand might waken them! Thoth-Amon sent death to Caranthes—Kallian's greed led bim to loose this horror—and it is lurking near us—it is creeping upon us—"

"Gibbering fool!" roared Diomus, striking Promero heavily across tbe mouth. "Well, Hymetrio, unless you believe this superstitious nonsense, I see naught for it but to arrest this barbarian—"

The Cimmerian cried out, glaring toward the door of the chamber adjoining the room of statues. "Look! I saw something move in that room—something that crossed the floor like a dark shadow."

"Bah!" said Bostoumo, the buge guardsman. "We have searched that room—"

"He saw something!" Promero's voice was shrill witb excitement. "This place is accursed! Something came out of the sarcophagus and slew Kallian Podarco! It hid wbere no man could hide, and now it lurks in that chamber! Mitra defend us from the powers of darkness!" He caugbt Diomus' sleeve. "Search that room again, my lord!"

"You shall search it yourself, clerk!" said Bostoumo as the

prefect shook off the clerk's frenzied grip. The prefectural guard grasped Promero by neck and girdle, pushed the screaming wretch before him to the entrance of the room in question, and hurled him so violently across the threshold that he fell and lay half stunned.

"Enough," said Diomus, eyeing the silent Cimmerian. The prefect lifted his hand and tension crackled in the air when an interruption occurred. A guardsman dragged in a slender richly-dressed figure, explaining, with the pleased look of one who expects praise for a worthy act, "I saw him slinking about the back of the Temple."

Instead of praise the man received curses that lifted his hair. "Release that gentleman!" shouted Diomus. "Know you not Astrias Petanius, nephew of the governor?"

The abashed guard fell away, trying to make himself look inconspicuous, while the young fop fastidiously brushed his sleeve. "Save your apologies, good Diomus," he lisped. "All in line of duty, I know. I was walking home from a late revel to rid my brain of the fumes. What have we here? Ishtar, is it murder?"

"Murder it is, my lord," said the prefect. "But we have a suspect who, though Hymetrio seems to have doubts on the matter, will go to the stake for it."

"A vicious-looking brute," murmured the young aristocrat. "How can any doubt his guilt? Never before have I seen so villainous a countenance."

"Oh, yes, you have, you scented cockroach," snarled the Cimmerian, "when you hired me to steal the goblet for you. Revels, eh? Bah! You were waiting for me to hand you the loot. I should not have revealed your name had you given me fair words, but now tell these dogs that you saw me climb the wall after the watchman made his last round, so that they shall know I had no time to kill this fat swine before Orys found the body."

Hymetrio looked quickly at Astrias. "If he speaks truth, my lord, it clears him of the murder, and we can easily hush up the other matter. The Cimmerian merits ten years in the mines for housebreaking, but we cannot so deal with him and expect him to keep silence. Nor would justice be served by a great scandal, especially as the theft was not consummated and as the victim no longer lives to complain. If you say the word, we'll arrange for this fellow to escape and none but us shall ever know about it—not your uncle or anybody. I understand—you would

not be the first gentleman to resort to desperate means to pay debts—but you can rely on our discretion."

Conan looked at the nobleman expectantly, but Astrias shrugged bis slender shoulders and covered a yawn witb a delicate white hand. "I know him not; he's mad to say I hired him. Let him take his deserts; he has a strong back for bearing ore in the mines."

Conan, eyes blazing; started as if stung. The guards tightened their grasp on tbeir bills. Then they relaxed as Conan dropped his head and let his shoulders sag as if in sullen resignation. Orys could not tell whether he was watching them from under his heavy black brows or not.

The Cimmerian struck with no more warning than a cobra. His sword flashed in tbe candlelight. Astrias began a shriek tbat ended sbarply as his head flew from his shoulders in a shower of blood, the features frozen into a white mask of horror.

Hymetrio, with more courage than sense, drew a dagger from his tunic and stepped forward for a stab. Catlike, Conan wheeled and thrust murderously for tbe inquisitor's groin. Hymetrio's instinctive recoil only partly avoided tbe point, whicb sank into his thigb, glanced from the bone, and plowed free through the outer side of the leg. Hymetrio sank to one knee with a groan of agony.

Conan did not pause. The bill tbat Diomus flung up saved the prefect's skull from the whistling blade which, turned slightly as it cut through the shaft, glanced from the side of his head and sheared off his right ear. The blinding speed of the barbarian paralyzed the police. Half of them would bave been down before they had a chance to fight back except that the burly Bostoumo, more by luck than by skill, threw his arms around the Cimmerian, pinioning his sword-arm. But Conan's left hand leaped to the guard's head and Bostoumo fell away shrieking, clutching a gaping red socket where an eye had been.

Conan bounded back from the waving bills. His leap carried him outside ths circle of his foes to whsre Orys had bent over to re-cock his crossbow. A savage kick in the face dropped bim, screaming through a ruin of splintered teeth and blowing bloody frotb from his mangled lips.

Then all were frozen in their tracks by the soul-shaking horror of a scream which rose from tbe chamber into wbich Bostoumo had burled Promero. From the velvet-hung door the clerk

came reeling and stood, shaking with great silent sobs, tears running down his pasty face and dripping from his sagging chin, like an idiot-babe weeping.

All halted to stare—Conan with his dripping sword, the guards with their lifted bills, Hymetrio crouching and striving to staunch the blood from his wound, Diomus clutching the bleeding stump of his severed ear, Orys weeping and spitting out a couple of broken teeth. Even Bostoumo ceased his howls and blinked with his good eye.

Promero reeled into the corridor and fell stiffly before them, screeching amid the high-pitched laughter of madness. "The god has a long reach! Ha-ha-ha! Oh, a cursed long reach!"

Then with a frightful convulsion he stiffened and lay grinning vacantly at the shadowy ceiling.

"He's dead!" whispered Diomus, bending over him and for the moment ignoring his own hurt and the dripping sword that had inflicted it. The prefect straightened up, his piggish eyes popping. "He's not wounded. In Mitra's name, *what is in that chamber?*"

Then horror swept over them and they ran screaming for the outer door. The guards, dropping their bills, jammed into it in a clawing and shrieking mob and burst through like madmen. Orys followed the unwounded guards, and the half-blind Bostoumo blundered after his fellows, squealing like a wounded pig and begging them not to leave him behind. He fell among the rearmost and they knocked him down and trampled him, screaming in their fear. He crawled after them, and after him came Hymetrio, limping along and holding his wounded thigh. Police, charioteer, watchman, and officials, wounded or whole, burst shrieking into the street, where the men watching the house took panic and joined in the flight, not waiting to ask why.

Conan stood in the great corridor alone save for the three corpses. Astrias' disembodied head and Bostoumo's gouged-out eye seemed to stare accusingly up at him from the floor.

The barbarian shifted his grip on his sword and strode into the chamber. It was hung with rich silken tapestries. Silken cushions and couches lay strewn about in careless profusion, and over a heavy screen of gilded brass a Face looked at the Cimmerian.

Conan stared in wonder at the cold, perfect beauty of that countenance, whose like he had never seen among the sons o

men. Neither weakness nor mercy nor cruelty nor kindness nor any other human emotion showed in those features. They might have been the marble mask of a god, carved by a master hand, except for the unmistakable life in them—life cold and strange, beyond the Cimmerian's knowledge or understanding. The concealed body must, he thought, possess a marble perfection to match the inhumanly beautiful face.

The finely-molded head swayed; the full lips opened and spoke a word, in a rich vibrant tone like the golden chimes that ring in the jungle-lost temples of Khitai. The word was in an unknown tongue, forgotten before the kingdoms of man arose, but Conan knew its meaning. "Come!"

And the Cimmerian came—with a desperate leap and a humming slash of his sword. The beautiful head flew from the body, struck the floor to one side of the screen, and rolled a little way before coming to rest.

Suddenly Conan's skin crawled, for the screen shook and heaved with the convulsions of something behind. He had seen and heard men die by the scores, and never had he heard a human being make such sounds in his death-throes. There was a thrashing, floundering noise. The screen shook, swayed, tottered, leaned forward, and fell with a metallic crash at Conan's feet. He looked beyond it.

Then the full horror of it rushed over the Cimmerian. He fled, nor did he slacken his headlong flight until the spires of Numalia faded into the dawn behind him. The thought of Set was like a nightmare, and the children of Set who once ruled the earth and who now slept in their nighted caverns below the black pyramids.

Behind that gilded screen had lain no human body—only the shimmering, headless coils of a gigantic serpent.

When space ships are ready, it now seems that men will be able to leave Earth without some of the formerly expected dangers. Mice and monkeys have been sent up in rockets. Studies of the returned animals are being made at considerable length, but there is no evidence as yet that any unusual radiation above the atmosphere has proved injurious.

BOOK REVIEWS

SCIENCE: Fact and Fiction

by
GEORGE O. SMITH

I have become very tired of the purist who objects to having the magazine story touched up or rewritten for book publication. In nearly every case, the work has been improved by the extra effort. It seems that an author can see places in his story that can be smoother, or a point that should be exploited, or even o fumble in the story-line much better in cold print than in typescript. Perhaps it is because of the greater distance, the author is reading o story cold instead of writing it hot.

So I have two jobs this month, both of which show a marked improvement over the magazine version. Oddly enough, each improvement is for a different reason:

JACK OF EAGLES by James Blish. Greenberg: Publisher, $2.75 • This tale first appeared in *Startling Stories* as "Let the Finder Beware" and was subsequently expanded and worked over to fill out the space between the hard covers. The result is smooth and interesting.

Danny Caiden is o normal sort of guy with only one peculiarity. He can find lost objects, now and then he can predict some coming event but with a low factor of accuracy, ond occasionally he can make a pair of dice roll sevens. He loses his job because one of his predictions backfires, and so Danny sets out to develop his hidden talents. He succeeds after a lot of fumbling and futile trying; he predicts a stock-market change and cashes in. But there are laws against juggling the market and Danny finds himself in hot water.

A fugitive from justice, Danny meets up with two worring factions who have developed their own wild talents. Both sides want Danny because Danny's latent skill is very high. One side is altruistic and using these talents in the hope of developing the same skills in the entire human race; the other side sees no reason to give someone else an

(Continued on page 119)

A MATTER OF FAITH

BY MICHAEL SHERMAN Illustrated by POULTON

Among an infinite multitude of worlds, almost any type of culture is possible. But all science requires that cause and effect be related. To the fellahin culture of the worlds of Ein, no real science was possible. There was only the will of Ein. Yet Dondyke found that both their religion and their peculiar science could be horribly effective!

Laird Dondyke found himself remembering that the descent to hell was easy. It was easy, too, to enter the planet Grekh; you just boarded an interworld ferry from either of the two sister-planets, Pittam or Speewry. There were no custom-houses,

immigration officials, or whatever; anyone might come and go as he chose. But the similarity between Avernus and Grekh ended there.

Corey had dissented, of course. Tom Corey had heen bitterly opposed to this whole husiness, now. It was Dondyke's own private bid for the jackpot, and what they'd faced up to now might prove easy hy comparison. But if Tom was right all the way—well, he wouldn't be the first man to go to hell to hring back a woman.

The shuttle between Speewry and Grekh was a matter of a few days, just long enough for Dondyke to work up a light sweat of anxiety over Corey. They'd parted on Speewry a week ago; they would meet on Grekh, hut Dondyke would have no way of knowing whether his partner had made it until the time came.

For the twentieth time, Dondyke shrugged. There was no use fretting; Tom was the levelheaded one, the balance wheel of the expedition. But he couldn't help remembering that Corey had tried to veto this return to Grekh, pointing out that Dondyke could work his personal plans just as well later, after they'd returned to Earth with the film they'd come after. They had to return for the ship—hut they didn't have to pull the whis-

kers of the Faithful hy stopping at the city.

The ferry's lights flickered as the ship nosed into the bluish aura that was the atmosphere of Grekh, the most important to Earth of the three nearly-identical worlds. The planet was a glohe hanging before them, swelling faintly as the aura thickened. Soon it would be a faint, pastel blue and the golden light of the sun—true gold in color—would give the feeling of entering a vast blue cavern; it was the same on all three of these worlds of Ein, hathed in this magic-seeming light.

He stood by a port, paying no heed to a knot of robed passengers, some kneeling, some standing, hut all genuflecting and chanting, "Ein, Ein!" The men in the nearest group made the ritual motions with the left hand, tracing a pattern in the air with the first two fingers; farther down the ship, another, similarly-dressed group also chanted and made the same patterns, but with their forefingers only—a life-and-death trifle that distinguished the True Believers of Grekh from the Faithful of Speewry. And if any son of the third world, Pittam, were aboard, he was tracing the same pattern, and calling upon the same deity—but although he used the two fingers of his left hand, as did the True Believers of Grekh, he began the pattern at the bottom, rather than the top.

Dondyke smiled outwardly at such hair-splitting, but there was no smile inside; at this moment, it would have been comforting to have a god upon whom to call for aid—or merely to commend his resignation. No knives would flash now; on all three worlds, the moments before entering the atmosphere of Ein's planets was too sacred to mar. But afterwards, any son of Grekh might seek the blood of one from Pittam or Speewry, while all considered the Infidel fair game. Dondyke couldn't hope that none of them would recognize him.

"You're looking on death, Unbeliever!"

The Earthling turned to grin at a hulky, dark-haired man in a sloppy uniform. "You're an Infidel, too, Ferrymaster."

The other returned the grin and ran a coarse hand across the stuhble on his jaw. "You forget that they need me; only Unbelievers can ply the ferries and trading ships—and navigators aren't easy come hy. But you, now—from what I've heard, you migbt be expendable."

There was a sardonic smoothness in his tone that made the

Earthling pause; nerves urged him to action. He held his breathing regular with difficulty and let his thoughts start taking form, trying to add up a fleeting impression. The Ferrymaster took a dirty toothpick out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth, while the lights began flickering again. "Sometimes the power cuts out completely when we hit atmosphere," he said too casually. "Looks as if it might happen this time."

Dondyke studied the right arm that hung too loosely. It was unusual for an Infidel not to mention his name when he met another in these worlds. And while no True Believer could operate machinery on Speewry or Pittam, even indirectly, there was a slight difference in the faith of Grekh. It might be possible for a convert . . .

Dondyke's hand shot forward to seize the other's wrist. "Silence—and hold still. There's a poisoned burr on my ring—the Lord Engineer's own formula. It's fast—and no antidote known." His other hand darted up to the dark man's armpit and prodded. He grinned savagely. "No Unbeliever carries a Tool of Vengeance, Ferrymaster. So you're to kill me when you have the lights cut off, as an Act of Faith?"

The Ferrymaster shook his head and relapsed into fatalism. "All is as Ein wills. For a moment, I was afraid, but now I fear nothing. Kill me if you like. Ein has a greater punishment in store for you, ravisher!"

Ravisher! But Alanna wouldn't have betrayed him, after that last night on Grekh before he left. If she'd recognized him as an Unbeliever—but she couldn't have known him. He'd based all his plans for abducting her back to Earth on that. Still, someone had recognized him. Well, Corey had always said he'd do himself in over a woman. He couldn't regret it, whatever the cost.

The Ferrymaster suddenly spat out the toothpick, and the lights went out as if that had been a signal. Probably it was. But it caught Dondyke off guard, and he loosened his grip. The man jerked back, freeing himself. The poison had been only a lie, anyhow.

Dondyke caught himself. There was the prick of a blade against his skin. Then his arm leaped out, and he had the Ferrymaster's wrist again. It was obvious now. They'd been saving him, making no effort against him, for this private Act of Faith against him. And they might still win, unless . . .

Then he had the knife, twisting it out of the other's hand

with the cat-like speed that had saved him from too many jams to mention. His arm shot out, and there was a shriek from the darkness. Ein had not deemed the Ferrymaster's Faith enough, and had gathered him back to the relative.

Dondyke leaped rapidly to one side, realizing that the man might have had an aide staked out for just such a contingency. He moved two steps, and collided with another body.

Fighting in the dark wasn't his idea of fun, but he'd done it before and survived. He'd left the knife in the Ferrymaster. The other seemed unarmed, which made them equal. He began pulling the man toward him, reaching for a throat, when something was suddenly pressed into his hand. His fingers closed over the familiar form of the container of microfilm they'd stolen on Speewry. "Tom!"

"Tried to warn you, Laird." The soft whisper came as they continued the mock battle, Dondyke slipping the container into the place he'd arranged in his clothing. The words came between grunts that were not entirely simulated; the lights might go on in any instant, and the struggle had to look good. "They know you're coming back, and why."

"My party now, then. Keep out. Wait at the ship, in the desert where we first landed. Did you get this open?"

"All copied, and copy's hidden in the ship. It'll blow up if they find it."

"Good." They were locked together now, where they could talk mouth to ear. "I'll take the original to the Lord's Engineer, make a deal, get safe conduct for Alanna and me, and we go back to Earth with the copy. If I don't show in a week, go back alone—don't try to help."

"I still say chuck the whole thing, Laird. It's been too easy. We're crowding our luck."

"Maybe," Dondyke said. Then he stiffened as the ship's lights revealed them. Corey was fixed as a lean, ragged fanatic. He closed in on his partner. "Get ready for it," he whispered.

The passengers were gathered around the pair now, at a respectful distance; and though there was no question that their sympathy was with the attacker, Dondyke knew that he didn't have to fear interference. This was another Act of Faith, an individual matter wherein the Believer trusted to his skill and the will of Ein. Civil disputes never devolved into violence—before witnesses, at least—without loud preambles and thorough accusations. If the attacker were bested, this would be regarded

as Ein's will; no other Believer would molest the victor before another sunrise. They'd be shocked enough to find two had already tried it on him.

He sent Corey flying across the deck, where the man suddenly seemed to slump and lie still. Dondyke went below, leaving the True Believers to their disappointment and the discovery of the dead Ferrymaster. For a while, they'd be sure Ein had willed his success—it might last long enough for him to succeed!

If not . . .

II

Easy is the descent to hell.

It had been more than easy. It had been rigged, from the moment he'd sat across from the Terrestrial Administrator in his office on Anteros, light-years away and back in time.

"We called you in, Dondyke, because you're just the crazy type of adventurer to pull off miracles—and because we think we've got an angle on you." The Administrator had smiled, brushing that aside for the moment. "Somewhere those ancient equations can be found on the worlds of Ein, and we're willing to pay *any* price for them. They're in a sort of code—one we can break—one container of microfilm, say, from the planet Grekh. Get those equations. Copies will do; we're not out to deprive the people of the originals, which have some religious importance to them. Bring back a copy and name your price."

It had sounded too pat then. The adventurer from the mother world of Earth had looked at the official and chuckled. "You couldn't pay it; I have my own matters to attend to. Sorry you wasted your time." He arose, slowly.

"Just a moment." The Administrator's smile was thin and not to Dondyke's liking. "I said we were willing to pay *any* price to get those equations. You're the man to get them for us." He flicked an intercom. "Bring in Corey!"

That stopped Dondyke. He hadn't seen Corey for five years, but his "own matters" had involved an emergency call from the former fellow adventurer. There was a blood debt, and Dondyke couldn't turn down such a call. Now . . .

Apparently Corey's call had been too late. Dondyke dropped back into his seat, and the Administrator continued. "We thought you might not be interested in the proposition, so we investigated. Thomas Corey has been convicted of treason and espionage; he has been sentenced to the Mercury mines!"

"Go on!" Dondyke saw the door open, while the guards brought in a lean, light-haired man. Corey made no sign that he recognized Dondyke.

"I've reviewed this case," the Administrator said, "and I'm not entirely convinced of Corey's guilt. The evidence against him is too strong to set aside his conviction at present; but I can offer a pardon under conditions."

His eyes swept to Corey, and the newcomer nodded. "I'm listening."

"You and Dondyke can go to the worlds of Ein, or you can serve a life sentence on the Mercury mines. If you succeed, I guarantee your pardon, and the restoration of your position—with consideration for extra service."

The Earthling adventurer veiled his eyes as he turned to the Administrator. "It looks like your deal, after all. What's the game?"

"Do you accept, Corey?"

"Naturally."

"Excellent. As you know, gentlemen, the three worlds of Ein are located in some peculiar section of space-time which the Hadley dimension drive can locate, but which we can't describe verbally. They are inhabited by the descendants of Earth people; how many centuries, relatively, the original exiles have lived there is anyone's guess; to us, the atomic age is no more than a couple of centuries old. They fled during the first decades, yet they must have inhabited the worlds of Ein for at least a millenium of their time—morphologists believe it would take about that long for their kind of scientific theocracy and semi-fellahin civilization to develop and reach the point it has."

"Any Terrestrials settled there since?" Corey wanted to know.

"Quite a few. At least several hundred Terrestrials and Earthlings. The *time* factor's peculiar; you set out today—you may arrive some decades behind someone who left last year. We know that the worlds were 'found' after the development of the Hadley drive—yet the grandchildren of some of the earliest settlers have come back."

"Then there's no telling what year it will be when *we* get back?"

"No. But going from that system to ours, the discrepancy isn't large. No one has returned before he left, so there have been no real paradoxes."

So they'd been given all the briefing there could be and a ship with the Hadley drive. They'd set out for Grekh—and

then the merry-go-round began with the discovery that the equations had already been stolen from Grekh by an agent of one of the other worlds. Unfortunately, according to Corey, they hadn't discovered it until the night when Dondyke had discovered Alanna. They had gone to Pittam, where they found a similar situation. And finally they had turned to Speewry.

And there it had been too easy. It had almost seemed that Speewry had only stolen the equations so that they could be put into the hands of Dondyke and Corey. It had worried Corey, and not without reason. But Dondyke had accepted the good luck and headed back toward his own private mission on Grekh.

They'd learned a lot—enough to write a book back on Earth and become authorities on the worlds of Ein—but not enough to live here long. Enough for Dondyke to be accepted and liked by many of the Faithful, but not enough for his acceptance by the woman he wanted. Alanna had made no secret of his attraction for her—but she hadn't known him for what he was.

It had been too easy, except for that. Even the clumsiness of the Ferrymaster had added to that deceptive ease. But Dondyke knew the ease of the descent to hell had nothing to do with what happened after that.

Corey's worries were echoing in his head as he slipped off the interworld ferry and set off for whatever he'd meet.

III

A whispering was around Dondyke as he strode through the narrow streets of the city six days later, a murmuring of tongues and dialects. The sun above him was golden in hue, and he had the feeling of having entered a cavern, the vault of which might be interplanetary distances away, but enclosed, nevertheless. He strode along with the feeling he was walking on eggshells.

There had been nothing positive he could name—only blind alleys to his search where there should have been none. Now he had one day left, and he was no nearer filling his mission than before. He had the urge to run, before a net settled over his head. He could almost see the cat-and-mouse game drawing to an end.

Yet everything looked the same. Over Pittam and Grekh hung the shadows of extinction, since those missing equations were the source of a weapon which all True Believers were certain could destroy a world

completely. Yet the people of Grekh went about their affairs with their idigenous fatalism, concerned only with salvation, confident that Ein was greatest and his will would prevail to their glory.

Here, as on the other worlds, was a profusion of dialects and of racial and body types. Terrestrials and their descendants were numerous and taken for granted, though most of them were Infidels. Costumes had no standardization, except for the religious-administrative orders. What a person wore depended on his taste and purse. Over in a courtyard a naked Seeker—a member of one of the many philosophic cults—was haranguing about the sinfulness of clothing.

The mutterings about Dondyke were discreet, the faces impassive. But a fair crowd followed at a moderate distance, pointing him out. "The Infidel returns; O Faithful, lock your sisters away!" Any female Believer was a sister, as any male was a brother—but the word could mean wives as well. He looked about; the glances that met his turned away quickly, but not too swiftly to conceal the knife-thoughts that lurked behind those eyes.

Some of those onlookers, no doubt, fingered Tools of Vengeance—knives decorated with the sacred symbols of Grekh, and woe to the Unbeliever who was discovered with one.

Underlying sameness—but with deadly trifles that made the difference. A genuflection made with two fingers instead of one; a pattern drawn from the top or the bottom. On such rested eternal salvation or damnation. These were the outward signs. Where wore the other differences? Why had he failed so quickly in his attempt to remain unknown among them long enough for his purpose?

A persistent voice kept telling him to turn back to the ship—now! He thrust it away. So he was throwing his life away for a fancy—it was only his life. Corey was aafe. He wouldn't overstay the limit. He'd go back to Earth as a hero.

Dondyke looked around again, trying to neglect the knife that ground against his nerves. "Tomorrow," he growled. "I've got till then, and I'll make the deal today." There was still no official charge, and he had nothing to fear but some private Act of Faith. He had one more day.

There would be no energy-weapons, unless they honored him by declaring a Holy War against bim personally. There were no Peacekeepers, as the po-

lice wers called, within sight. The moh couldn't vent fury on him unless he were arrested, and even knife-throwing was permitted only in real hattle. When his time was up, he'd go. He shrugged, smiling at the realization of how appropriate the philosophy was.

Few vehicles were in evidence, and no animals were on the streets, tortuous and ill-lit as they were. Low huildings overhung the streets, and foothridges spanned the second-stories. He stood to one side, as a bevy of colorfully-clad servants approached, bearing a litter; he restrained himself from smiling at its blonde occupant. There were no street-signs, but he knew better than to ask directions. He had to rely on memory.

The deep tones of a gong came to his ears, from an open plaza ahead. At once, all fell silent around him, all motion stopped Then, from a concealed speaker came the cultivated, authoritative words of an official Proclaimer.

"In the name of Ein and the Son of Grekh! Let any who hear and are Unhelievers come now to witness justice." Twice more it was repeated. Then the Proclaimer added his postscript. "Any beloved children of Grekh who are not engaged in the Lord's lahor or sick, let them come also and witness what Ein wills to be. No command is this nor shall penalty be laid upon you if you heed not; yet it is better that you come."

Dondyke scowled, but there was no escape; he could only hope that the executions, if any, would he few and that there would he no sermons or prolonged trials. If luck was really against him, it might last until sundown, though.

When he arrived at the plaza, to take a hench reserved for Infidels, his heart sank momentarily. This looked like a two or three day session. The Faithful could come and go as they wished, but it would go hard with the Unheliever who tried to slip out. He'd be well fed and given comfortable sleeping accommodations; hut only a summons from an official could permit his departure before the final prayer. The roll of microfilm seemed to burn him, in spite of its disguise. And the ship would leave tomorrow—his only way to get back to Earth!

The Proclaimer mounted a pulpit in the far corner of the plaza, and the judge was entering, to seat himself in the central chair, hefore a hroad tahle.

"In the name of Ein and his Engineer! Thus sayeth Grekh: When the poor man cries for jus

tice, let him be heard, nor suffer him to stand waiting upon the business of the mighty."

Dondyke groaned. Civil suits would begin the proceedings, and they might take days!

The first case was interesting, at least, though Dondyke had learned enough not to expect anything spicy. The complaint told of seduction, breach of promise, and desertion; but these were only background. The charge was defamation of the woman's character, involving economic injustice—girls of that business paid higher taxes. Preliminary examination established that both the man and woman were children of Grekh. The question was: had the bounder given malicious and false information to the tax collectors?

It could have been worse. Readings from scripture were at a minimum, and the case moved right along, to end in an hour and a half. Honor was restored, her status was changed, and excess taxes were to be refunded with interest. The accused was dismissed with a warning, since the evidence hadn't established that he'd committed slander.

Refreshment was served as the trials proceeded; Dondyke leaned back during the following cases, trying to figure his time to the ship. He'd need most of the night, at least. Finally the Proclaimer announced that sentence would be passed on three convicts who had been tried the preceding day.

"In the name of Ein and the Son of Grekh! Let the convicted ravisher, Ahren, be brought forth."

There was a clanking of chains as the convict was led in. A court attendant set pen, ink and parchment before the judge, who genuflected and leaned forward to write out the sentence. The blotted parchment was carried to the pulpit of the Proclaimer.

"Ahren, false follower of Ein, Deceiver from Pittam—on whom Ein's cure lie—you did enter into conversation with a daughter of Grekh in the absence of her brothers." This was a mere summary. "That you touched her not does not absolve you, for evil lies in intent, and is not diminished by degree of action."

He picked up the parchment, scanned it, and took up a weighty volume to one side, thumbing through the pages. Obviously, the judge had merely noted chapter and verse, which meant the law was to be enforced literally.

"Whatever Deceiver shall ravish a son or daughter of Grekh, that one shall surely be put to death."

The accused showed no con-

cern over the sentence, but tried to lift his chained left hand to trace the symbol of Ein in the air as was done on Pittam. Such blasphemy was provided against by the chains. The servants hurried him away.

Again the gong, and the Proclaimer's voice. "Let the convicted Unbeliever be brought forth."

Dondyke sat upright. This was why all Infidels in the district were compelled to attend court. He saw the condemned brought in, wearing the garb of a trader, a broad-brimmed hat shielding his face. Then he looked up where the sun was in decline. Time was nearly up.

"Thus sayeth Grekh: let not the Infidel, whatever his fault, be put to death without a chance to embrace Ein, the merciful; and let mercy be shown to the Unbeliever who testifies."

The judge leaned forward. "Unbeliever, you have refused to speak, and your silence has proven your guilt. Yet may your life be spared if you testify before me; and if you then answer our questions, further mercy shall be shown you."

Any Infidel could escape the death-sentence for any crime short of assassination of the Lord's Engineer by being converted. But it was rare for extra mercy to be offered for cooperation. It bespoke an unusual case, and the lack of court-summaries indicated a political offense in the state-secret category.

"You have destroyed all evidence save the testimony of those who saw what they saw, but the record of all rests in your brain, Infidel," continued the judge. "By the will of Ein, this information can be obtained from you painlessly if you cooperate, or it can be agony if you resist."

Why didn't the fool testify? They'd learn what they wanted to know in any event.

Dondyke's musings were cut short as the prisoner spoke. "I will testify."

Corey's voice! Then—the ship had been discovered! That was the crime, and a deadly one indeed. The ship had been destroyed—there was no way back! Now they'd get the full record of Corey's and Dondyke's mission. They'd hunt Dondyke down at once . . .

Corey must have held out as long as he could, hoping for summary execution.

Dondyke saw Corey straighten and turn, slightly, so that part of his profile was visible to the onlookers. Then his voice rang out. "There is no Lord save Ein, and *unto Pittam were the equations given!*"

For an instant, all was silence—like the moment that follows a wreck, the moment before screams break out. Then rage was howling through the court. Dondyke leaped to his feet, the spell that had frozen him broken. But the Faithful in the front rows were swift in their vengeance. A dozen of them had leapt upon the blasphemer before the Earthling could take more than a step. He saw the flash of knives . . .

Dondyke staggered back, his brain numb. No eyes were on him. He was forgotten for the moment. Nothing could be done for Corey—nothing. Nor could anyone get any information from him. He'd taken the only way to conceal that.

Laird Dondyke turned and slipped softly toward the nearest exit, his mind racing, careful not to run yet, lest someone's attention should be drawn, before anyone remembered now that another Infidel was present.

He was running, though, when he realized that there was now no place to which he could run!

IV

He seemed to have been running forever—running and hiding, to dash on again. Long since, he'd ceased to notice where his feet were taking him. The city was an unreal thing around him; the only reality was an ache that filled his body, and the weight of the film he carried. It was light enough, yet it seemed to drag him back. His fingers started to tear it away; then they dropped limply to bis sides.

If it was found on him, the answer was death. If he threw it away, the result was the same. It had been with him too long, had soaked up his personal body-aura which machines here could detect. Mechanical bloodhounds would find him quickly and surely where men without them might fail. No amount of washing or disinfecting could wipe away the trace now; only time would dispel it, and time was against him.

It was night again, nlght with the streets nearly deserted; a magic quality lay over the city, magic that had been his friend many a night before. Beyond the wall, he heard a woman singing, and did not hear, for the voice in his brain was another voice and another woman. Then it was Corey's voice, whispering. "I have a feeling we're crowding our luck."

Dondyke turned, looking around him wildly, knowing in part that no one spoke to him, no one pursued. It was only a

fever from Speewry, striking at him tardily, now that he was exhausted physically and mentally. There were stars in the sky, stars that fell into unfamiliar patterns, and Dondyke yearned to find a ship to take him into the midst of their strangeness, to travel faster than thoughts that crowded upon him. He had to run faster, run to the ship.

There was no ship; the ship was gone. There was no ship; the way back was gone.

Then, abruptly, the sounds died; he felt a curious, detached sensation, as if he were both standing outside himself and within; he could feel the semi-resilient pavement beneath his feet, hear the now-slowing beating of his heart, see occasional spots of light as he passed a tavern or latticed window, smell the air freshened by rain.

And the detached Dondyke looked about contemplatively and wondered what he would have done had he been in Corey's position.

"I'd have gambled," the other Dondyke replied instantly. "I'd have testified straight, joined up, looked for another day when I could beat the opposition at their own game. Bluff them—never say die . . ."

But the time would come when he'd have to say die, and know it was real—when there was no way out, no choice but the manner of death, and perhaps not even that—only the way to take it. A time when no amount of imagination, bluff, swagger, bravado, or whatever would let him kick over the table and stop a game that was going against him, turn it into a contest on his own grounds!

"I can choose," protested the other Dondyke, defiantly. "I can always choose." He was breathing more easily now. "I can make my choice, and it's a free choice because no one can make it for me, or force me to accept any other choice against my will."

But only the choice itself was free; he hadn't picked the alternatives, and none of them were to his liking.

"I can still choose," the other Dondyke insisted, walking mechanically again. He'd adapt himself to this world, now; there was no other world for him. Change his appearance; play the game the way they demanded until a break came . . .

But he couldn't fool them; there were attitudes and ways he hadn't learned. They'd spot him, no matter what he tried.

The night had somehow gone, the sun was golden above his head before he knew it was there again. The voice within him sank

back into the depths and he came to a stop, slipping back into the shadows of an alley. He had to stop, to think this out . . .

There was a child in front of him, a small boy looking up at him. He could hear the boy's steps, and a sudden tearing sound from above that jerked his eyes up. On the roof of the building, one of the big tiles was slipping, just over the child.

A burst of strength sent Dondyke leaping out into the sun, to seize the toddler, take a few quick steps and set him down as the tile thudded to the pavement. Then the scene blurred; there was a hand on his arm. He couldn't be caught now—he had to hide, to change himself, to adapt!

Then . . . a face before him, a wise and gentle face, and an old man's hands were guiding him to a place out of the street. He crossed a patio, entered a house, and the old man's hands were leading him to a couch.

There was sleep, then, pierced by dreams which shivered into nothing when he stirred to momentary wakefulness, and he heard the sound of rain. Rain entered into his dreams, and voices—voices that echoed his inner torments of the night and other voices that came from without, crying for the Infidel.

V

He was awake and himself again. He opened his eyes and saw an old man seated on a cushion beside his couch, smoking a pipe and watching him with the patient eyes of one to whom eternity is nothing. Without knowing how he knew, the Earthling realized that the voices from outside had been those of Peacemakers, demanding him.

But the old one had sent them away. And Dondyke recognized him now—Kalin, the First Hypothetician, second highest religious authority on the planet, subordinate only to the Son of Grekh, the Lord's Engineer himself.

"Why did you tell them I wasn't here?" he asked.

"I did not tell them so. They asked me for an Unbeliever and I said that none was here."

"But—Kalin, I'm Laird Dondyke, Earthman and Infidel, wanted by the authorities."

The Hypothetician nodded, then arose and drew the curtains, admitting a stream of golden sunlight that seemed to play about his hair. Dondyke could look out into the courtyard and the street beyond, but the glass was transparent only one way. "True," the old man said. "You are Dondyke—but no Infidel, I

think. Your action was that of a son of Grekh, and I see the hand of Ein bringing you here."

The fugitive shook his head, trying to brush away mental cobwebs. He raised himself on an elbow and found the movement an exertion. No matter now, even if he could stand; he knew servants were near, and could enter the nearly bare room—bare except for the couch, the cushion, and a small table—before he could reach the doorway.

"I don't understand," he said. "The way you say it, it must mean something important to you; but these matters mean very little to me."

Kalin smiled slowly, then clapped his hands, and a servant entered, bearing food and drink on a tray. He put them on the table, and Dondyke could see no weapon.

"Eat, drink, and hear me," Kalin said. "You do not know what you did. They tell me you came into this sector like a man in a trance. There was no thought of what this act might mean to you; you did it without calculation or even impulse that you knew." He made a sign and the servant left, returning with a small boy.

The child ran to the oldster and climbed upon his lap. Kalin stroked the boy's head. "Do you remember this boy, Dondyke?"

The features were familiar, but Dondyke could not place them. "I . . . I . . ." He paused, wondering why his speech failed him. "I think I have seen him, or a child very much like him, somewhere . . ."

"This is my grandson, the last gift of descendants from Ein; it pleased Ein that my seed brought forth girls only, and I loved them, yet what man seeks not a son in his image? Of my daughters, none remain in this world. But she who was my favored child gladdened my heart with a man-child ere she returned to the relative.

"You, Dondyke, are a hunted man. You fled from pursuit last night, knowing your life forfeit. Yet when day came, you moved from the shadows to the light where all watchers could see you clearly. You came straight to pick up this child and bear him to safety."

He paused and considered Dondyke. "There is no evil in you—youth and wildness, but the substance of Evil dwells not in you. I tell you, Dondyke, Ein has sent you here just as Holy War with Speewry comes."

There was laughter in Dondyke's belly, coming up into his throat, but when he looked at the old man and the child again, his mockery died within him. When he spoke, his voice was

soft. "These things have never meant anything to me; why should they now? I have heard of your god, but it means little to me." He sat up suddenly, breathing heavily. "Bah! Am I a sniveler, to go fawning after religion I cared nothing for all my life, or bargain with a god I paid no heed when I thought the game was mine? No! I do not mock you, Kalin—or Ein—but I don't do homage, either."

The old man nodded, then arose and went out of the room, hand in hand with the boy. Dondyke sank back on the couch. He was a fool. He'd spit on the last chance he'd probably get. He'd be treated well enough—until he was well enough to be taken away. His fingers searched his clothing until he found the object he had forgotten since he left the court; they hadn't searched him.

VI

Kalin came again the following day, but made no reference to their previous conversation. He spoke of other Terrestrials he had met, and asked Dondyke about his home planet. Yet he always stopped short of asking leading questions. And he asked about Dondyke's health.

"It's damned strange, Hypothetician; I've gone through worse strains than this without keeling over."

"There are some sicknesses no doctor can find, Dondyke, for Ein works in a way beyond all understanding. He has made us all different, and you he has made as he has made you; you call yourself Infidel, yet your heart gives lie to your tongue. You can remove this lie, which your mind insists on, but your heart rejects. Submit to your heart, Dondyke, and know what your intellect tells you is weakness for the strength it is. There is war within you, and the battle drains you; you need strength for a greater war."

"You really believe this, don't you, Kalin?"

The Hypothetician's face was grave, and his gentle voice took on a more forbidding tone. "We know much about you—I and those who have watched you many months, here and on Speewry, Ein disrupt it! My watchers have reported, and from many small pieces, I have made a picture. I know what you carry with you, Dondyke!"

The Earthling started and swore beneath his breath. He'd given himself away like a tyro. He tried to get up.

"Ein has taken your strength from you; yet, this and more can be returned to you if you submit to him."

"And if I refuse?"

"As Ein wills, so shall it be. Yet you but fill a design, since Ein is the master of stratagem. Are you afraid to make a test, Dondyke?"

"What kind of a test?"

"One which I, too, shall share. For I stake my faith that if you testify, your strength will return."

"Suppose it doesn't?"

Kalin stroked his beard. "We shall take the object from you and you will be given safe passage to Speewry—or Pittam, if you like, be it cursed. Do you fear the test?"

Dondyke smiled bitterly. Back to Speewry or Pittam! The old one would keep his promise—the Act of Faith was the most sacred task in the worlds of Ein. But much good it would do in the other hostile worlds. What could he lose? Testify straight; join up; see if they could be bested at their own game.

He drew a deep breath, almost regretting his decision at the old man's expression of joy. "I'll testify: *There is no Lord save Ein, and unto Grekh were the equations given.*"

Kalin beamed. "Now is the substance of Ein in you, Dondyke. Tomorrow, believe it, my son, you will be whole. You wish to see the Lord's Engineer, do you not?"

"I'd planned to," the Earthling admitted.

"So shall it be. I have told no one of what you have. You shall tell him. But Ein dispenses knowledge to those whom he will, and it is best to be prepared. Your heart has spoken but your mind still follows your own purposes. Let it be so, but I shall prepare you."

VII

Way was made for Dondyke as he pushed on, noting the landmarks, until he came to the great dome that was the Engineer's palace. It lay a short distance from other dwellings and markets, pure white in color, and apparently unbroken. The fact that he had come this far unmolested told Dondyke that he would not be hindered, even though some of the populace showed their dislike. He would be admitted to the Engineer's palace. After that . . .

There were no guards outside, no visible signs of temporal power. He came up to the dome and stepped on a golden flagstone, marvelling again at the deceptive technology of the worlds of Ein. He stood and waited until an opening appeared in the dome, seemingly by magic; a small crowd watched from a respectful distance, mur-

muring in awe as the Earthling stepped through the portal, which vanished behind him.

Bright gold lined an imitation vault above his head; the inner surface was flecked with silver stars at its top, symbols of the Faithful of the visible manifestation of Ein. On the walls, the gold was interlaced with arabesques of mathematical notations and signs, woven into fantastic patterns; the floor was a huge mosaic of differential equations, surrounding an enormous infinity symbol. Here it signified that all existence—past, present, future and their infinite bypaths—was contained within the infinite substance of Ein.

The antechamber was vacant, save for a man seated on a hassock. He wore the robes of high and trusted service in temporal matters—white, trimmed with gold; but the absence of the infinity symbol on his garments proclaimed him an Unbeliever. The Engineer made use of whatever material Ein sent to the children of Grekh.

Unbelievers who held public office on Grekb bad no names. This man was known only as the Lord's Designer, and Dondyke had met bim before. The official looked at the Earthling for a moment, then said, "You were a fool to return, Laird Dondyke. There can be no mercy for you in the eyes of the Son of Grekh; your deceit is known."

Had Kalin betrayed him, after all? No, it didn't sound right; the Designer must be referring to his conversion. He smiled. "By the cones of Ein, Lord Designer, I speak fact. I have seen the First Hypothetician, Kalin, and have testified before him; it is as a subject and fellow-Believer that I crave an audience with the Lord's Engineer."

"A scoundrel as well as a fool but that is hardly news." There was a suggestion of a smile on the other's face that belied his words. "By Ein himself, I like you, Dondyke, and I'll do what I can. But you've leaped into the fire. As an Infidel, you had certain immunities which you lost the moment you became a convert." He shook his head and stroked his short beard. "You should have waited, conversion too early can be as fatal as too late. Well, you're warned; I can do little more than make suggestions to His Intellect."

"You underestimate your influence. I'd rather have it for me than against me."

"I am as Ein made me," the other said diffidently. He lowered his voice. "I hope you took time to learn the True Abstractions. If you knew the Extrapolations as well, it wouldn't

hurt—though that could hardly be expected from a fresh convert."

Dondyke shrugged. The Designer took out a pipe and lit it. "Bah! You tried to abduct a daughter of Grekh. You know there can be no compatibility between the children of Grekh and Unbelievers."

Dondyke nodded and frowned. "I knew it. Whence I came, my language, my skin color—all are irrelevant. It doesn't matter. I could be the Engineer's son, and if I didn't believe . . ."

He tried to say the words lightly, but there was realization in him of their seriousness. He was bound to the worlds of Ein now. Alanna, who hadn't been in his plans, had indirectly put him in that position. They could have gone directly to the ship and have been safely back to Earth by now. But she had existed, he had seen her . . . that was all.

"I learned the True Abstractions *and* the Extrapolations *and* the Postulates of Ein, for your information. I can plead my case. *'Thus sayeth Grekh—knowledge and intelligence and great cunning may there be among the Infidel, yet, children, let not thyself be misled; for from Ein alone comes understanding; and without Ein, knowledge is empty recitation, intelligence a delusion, and the cunning shall devise their own downfall.'* " The Earthling exhaled, grinning.

Behind the Designer, a spot on the wall glowed and spread to form a large circle. It became translucent, then transparent, until it appeared to be a portal through which any could pass. To the ignorant, this was magic; to the educated among the Faithful, the use of Ein's will by certain procedures. Dondyke knew that energy machines below the dome had altered the vibrational patterns in the area so that solid objects still vibrating at normal rate in this world could psss through as water passed through sand. There would be no resistance.

The Designer nodded. "So be it. Now we consult His Intellect."

The room they entered was only slightly larger than the antechamber, containing only a video screen and a desk, behind which sat the Lord's Engineer, first among the sons of Grekh. Unlike the potentates of the other two worlds—the flabby Son of Speewry, under the thumbs of his wives, and the monkish Son of Pittam, who spent all his time on theology and left administration to peculating viziers—this man hore a reasonable resemblance to the adulatory descriptions of him. Like the ancient Saladin of Earth, he could

be a man who made history, rather than being its object.

Alone among the multitudes of the Faithful, this man wore pure white, and the golden infinity symhol lay directly over his heart. He affected no rings, bracelets, turban or otber covering on his head, no jewelled garters, or fur-trimmed shoes, as were worn by most of the lesser officials.

Dondyke followed the Designer, waiting for him to repeat the salutation. *Relativity reets in all Being*, and for the Son of Grekh to trace the infinity symbol with his left hand. The ruler motioned his Designer to a seat at his right and Dondyke to another, in front of the desk.

"The ways of Ein are beyond all formulation," he said. "Is the Unbeliever driven by madness that he returns to us?"

Dondyke remembered Kalin's explicit instructions. No matter what the ruler said to him, his first response must be, "To the Intellect of the Lord become flesh would I testify." He put as much conviction into the phrase as his voice could muster.

"Whoever would testify, let him be heard without prejudice."

Dondyke performed the genuflection, tracing the infinity symbol in the air with two fingers of his left hand, starting at the top; if he erred, it would be his last mistake.

. "*There is no Lord save Ein, and unto Grekh were the equations given.*"

Now the Son of Grekh bowed his head, hearing and speaking as both priest and potentate, for there could be no division between church and state here. "Ein be in thy words, True Believer; speak to me now of the True Abstractions."

This phrase was meant literally; to these people, the words of Ein *were* Ein, as were the symbols and genuflections; the very substance of the god was in them, and the slightest alteration in their structure obliterated the godhead from them, leaving them open to the substance of Evil.

The convert drew in a deep breath. Faulty memory, of course, betrayed the substance of Evil in the speaker, unmasked him as a Deceiver.

"*Upon a far world did Ein create the racee of Man, and to great estate did he raies them. But ths subetance of Evil, warring with the Lord, infiltrated many unwary ones among men, bringing forth hereeies, blasphemies, and schiems, driving men to destruction until at last the planet itself approached annihilation. Yet Ein, who is master of stratagem, knew all the*

strategems of Evil; and unto Grekh did the Lord reveal the Equations, bidding him to construct. And Grekh gathered followers about him, constructing as the Equations of the Lord directed, that they might seek safety in a distant world, as Ein willed.

"Now with Grekh were two followers, Pittam and Speewry, be they cursed, into whom the substance of Evil crept; by stealth did they copy the Equations that they might deceive and traduce the children of Grekh when they had come to the world where the Lord directed them, and which they named after Grekh. And, by Evil, were two similar worlds created, and placed in the same syetem as Grekh; thither came the accursed Pittam and Speewry, and their followers, calling themselves also children of Ein.

"Yet only unto Grekh were the Equations given, and when Ein wills, as happens all that happens by his will, then shall the False Followers be destroyed."

The Lord's Engineer raised his head, made the infinity symbol, then pressed a button on his desk. An instant later, a servant entered through another spot in the wall, bearing a tray which she placed on the desk. As she saluted, then turned to exit, Dondyke found himself regretting that the Designer insisted upon maintaining his status of honored Infidel; the daughters of Grekh had to cover themselves completely from the eyes of Unbelievers—happily, though, the law did not specify the material that should make up their clothing, and the Earthling appreciated the fact that the girl's garments couldn't have been more sheer. The ruler took the lid off the tray, motioned to the objects thereon. "Eat, then, of the cones of Ein, True Believer."

He'd passed the first test; Ein only knew how many more there would be. Dondyke tried to remember what he'd picked up of the postulates of Ein, the common law, constantly swelling, which made up the volumes from which the official Proclaimers chanted, prefacing each quotation with, "*Thus sayeth Grekh.*"

According to the ritual, Dondyke picked up one of the small ice cream cones with his right hand; the Designer wound his sash about the finger of his right hand and took the second cone; the current Son of Grekh then picked up the remaining cone with his left hand. The two Believers ate their cones, while the Designer replaced his on the tray. When they had finished, the ruler of Grekh spoke again.

"There are those who call falsely upon Ein, and Believers

may be deceived thereby even I, when Ein so wills; but the True Believer and child of Grekh alone can perform an Act of Faith. Your testimony has been heard, Dondyke; choose your task, as is required when the Infidel dedicates himself to Ein. For know that the True Believer cannot err in the rightness of his choice."

And that, Dondyke thought, was the second test.

The Lord's Engineer, or anyone else here, could afford to make ritual acceptance of the Earthling's conversion, so long as he testified and performed the initial ritual correctly. But verbal declarations would not be taken as final; they would give him all the instruction he wished in these simple matters, but none would assist the neophyte as to what sort of task was appropriate for his Act of Faith.

A True Believer was supposed to know. If he was not pretending, then he had literally been entered into by the substance of Ein, and error in religious matters was now impossible.

He glanced at the Designer now, and nodded, as if to admit that he saw why the other hadn't joined. As a professed Unbeliever, the man had definite rights, and certain advantages over the Faithful, so long as he obeyed the laws and paid tribute; in some ways, he could live more securely than a Believer, so long as he remembered the essentials. But strait and hard was the way for any person not bred in the environment of the culture, if he wished to become a member of the consensus. A native might atone satisfactorily for minor deviations, but not a convert—one slip proved the conversion deceit, and the convert himself an embodiment of the substance of Evil.

Dondyke smiled grimly as these thoughts ran through his mind, as much at himself as at the wry humor behind it. It would be swift at worst, he thought. They didn't go in for torture; they would look on him as Ein's instrument of testing their vigilance, show him courtesy because Ein had presented him in the form of a man, and politely introduce him to the vibration chamber.

He thought of the jests that would pass around the Terrestrial Administration office as time went by without his return, but the picture refused to stick with him. He took a deep breath, bringing his thoughts into focus.

"The Equations of Ein," he said, "were put onto microfilm—as were the deceptions of Pittam and Speewry, be they cursed! All in all, there were hundreds of

rolls of film, containing wisdom of all kinds, which Grekh included for True Believers for days then to come."

"All this is manifestly so," agreed the Lord's Engineer, "but let us come to the point."

"I am at the point, Your Intellect. One of these rolls was stolen not long ago, and the theft was traced to the Deceivers of Speewry. Many children of Grekh have returned to the relative in attempts to recover the sacred film; but if I have not been misguided, Ein has not yet willed its delivery into your hands."

The ruler nodded. "And you, Laird Dondyke, do choose this for your Act of Faith?"

Dondyke shook his head. "There is no longer any need, Your Intellect." He reached into the pocket and unzipped the leather pouch, sighing with relief as his fingers touched the metal container. He placed it on the desk. "Ein has willed that the sacred film be returned to you now."

The Son of Grekh stood up, his eyes fixed upon the container; he reached beneath his blouse to bring out a small object that looked like a pendant. With his left hand, the ruler picked up the container and placed the tip of the object against it. At once, the metal began to glow; then, as the Lord's Engineer traced the infinity symbol, it aplit open and a roll of film popped out upon the desk.

"Verily, Ein wills that I behold a miracle," breatbed the Designer. "Dondyke, you didn't cart it off to carry it back in your pocket, did you?"

Laird Dondyke laughed easily now. "Hardly. Though even that wouldn't have been impossible, had Ein so willed," he added judiciously. He turned to face the Son of Grekh. "This I confess freely, Your Intellect. When I started out after the sacred film, I was an Unbeliever, and it was in my thoughts to use the film for a bargaining-point with you. But I came to know that only the will of Ein could have delivered it to me, and permitted me to bring it to you. I am here, but not to bargain. I appear before Your Intellect as a repentant sinner, hopeful of the mercy for which you are known and praised daily by the Faitbful."

"The Lord has willed that we who rule or assist in ruling should temper justice with mercy where tbe offender repents," the Son of Grekh said. He looked at the Designer. "What would you say in this case?"

The other shook his head. "My understanding is but sufficient to

hear and obey; yet it would seem that mercy would not be wasted."

"Ein gives you a sage tongue, honored Infidel. And truly, it would seem that Ein is in you, Dondyke. There can be neither admonishment nor chastisement for your sins of yesterday, for Ein willed them that you might be brought onto him. And whatever favor you wish shall be so, if Ein wills." Before Dondyke could reply, he pushed a stud on his desk and spoke into a microphone, then turned to the Earthling. "The maiden shall be sent to you without delay!"

Dondyke blinked, but he knew thanks were not in order here. He hadn't expected that. But he controlled himself. "Then let me speak to the Protector of the Faithful. Speewry, on whom Ein's curse rest, plots war against us. I saw the preparations—part of them—while I was there. I don't know exactly what they have, but they're confident of success, and act as if they mean to strike soon."

"We have heard." The ruler touched the roll of film. "In this Ein has dictated the secret of their doom and our safety. Herein lie the secret names of many things, including that of their world. We shall construct according to the sacred Equations, as Ein wills, and the secret name of Speewry may be broadcast with such intensity that the accursed world returns to the relative."

Dondyke found it hard not to shudder. Behind the religious mummery, he knew, there lay solid technology—the secrets he'd been sent to steal. They had vibrational weapons that could do amazing things to matter. But it was all magic on the surface.

He'd read something about the legends of secret names on Earth, the "numina" of objects. Perhaps it wasn't a name, but a key vibration. Hit the "secret name" of a water-glass on a violin, and the glass shattered.

He finished the interview and went out eagerly to meet Alanna again. But his thoughts were on the test of the Act of Faith. In war time it might be worse than usual.

VIII

There was no literal sword over his head, but Dondyke was learning what Damocles must have gone through; he felt like the man who had taken the king's place only to learn why Damocles was happy to hire a substitute. Corey's words echoed again; it had been too easy, so far . . .

It was too easy. He had the feeling that, if the circumstances

hadn't occurred as they had, some other happening would have landed him in the same position. Kalin had said he knew what the Earthling was carrying, but Kalin bad seemed unsurprised.

He'd been playing their game for them all along, he thougbt; the theory wasn't flattering to him, but it seemed to have some rationality. He tried to tabulate the factors.

Item: the Equations had been stolen from Grekh, and from Pittam; no doubt of that. The entire populace had been too moved for it to be a put-up job, and Dondyke and Corey weren't important enough to trap in such elaborate ways.

No; their usefulness had come after the event.

Item: the Equations were necessary for the war; whoever had them could build whatever weapon it was which would annihilate tbe other two.

Therefore, Grekh had been forced to get the film back.

Item: a number of the Faithful had perished in the attempt to recover the stolen film—True Believers of Grekh. He and Corey had arrived on Speewry shortly after one plot was uncovered and had attended the trials. No put-up there.

Therefore, it should not have been simple for Corey and bim to steal the film; yet, when all was said and done, they had accomplished it with comparative ease.

Why? Either agents of Grekh on Speewry had run interference for the Unbelievers, assuming they could get information which a native of any of the three worlds could not—since this was a sacred matter and their religious training would force them to betray themselves; or else Speewry had wanted the film returned to Grekh!

The first would explain the absence of pursuit from Speewry, and also how Kalin knew as well as why Dondyke was sent to the Lord's Engineer. The other explanation would account for everything, too—perhaps even better. Either way, it looked as if his part had been written for him. But why should Speewry be willing to let Grekh have its sacred Equations back when tbey were necessary for constructing a weapon? Why had there been only one copy in the first place? Why didn't anyone know the contents of the film, at least?

Of course, he knew that the Believers on all three worlds were certain that the other two worlds would be destroyed. The return of the film would be a sign that Ein willed the immediate annihilation of Speewry.

If it had been taking place anywhere else, the answers would be simple: the Equations had been tampered with, then resealed. Speewry had taken the originals, made a copy with significant alterations, and waited for agents of Grekh to steal them back. All the failures could have been window dressing; when Speewry was ready, the next attempt at recovery could be successful.

As it had been!

But this was not Earth. Here only the implements of the rulers could open the containers. Corey had known how to cut the container open and reseal it without leaving a trace. But no one on the worlds of Ein had developed such tools. Dondyke was certain of that.

He arose from the couch in the palatial apartment they'd given him, and strode to the window, oblivious of Alanna beside him.

"My lord is pensive," she said. "Grekh sayeth that a man should speak his heart to his sister, lest his thoughts fester."

Dondyke looked at her and around the apartment. Any other time, he'd have enjoyed this. Lord, he wished he could talk with her about it all; she was smart enough. But Ein couldn't save him if he let on.

"Is my lord displeased with his sister?"

She knew damned well he wasn't. He sighed and said, "I await inspiration."

And that was true enough. They had accepted his conversion so quickly that it must mean his Act of Faith would be "inappropriate"—unless it was something too good for them to pass up. Either way, they couldn't lose.

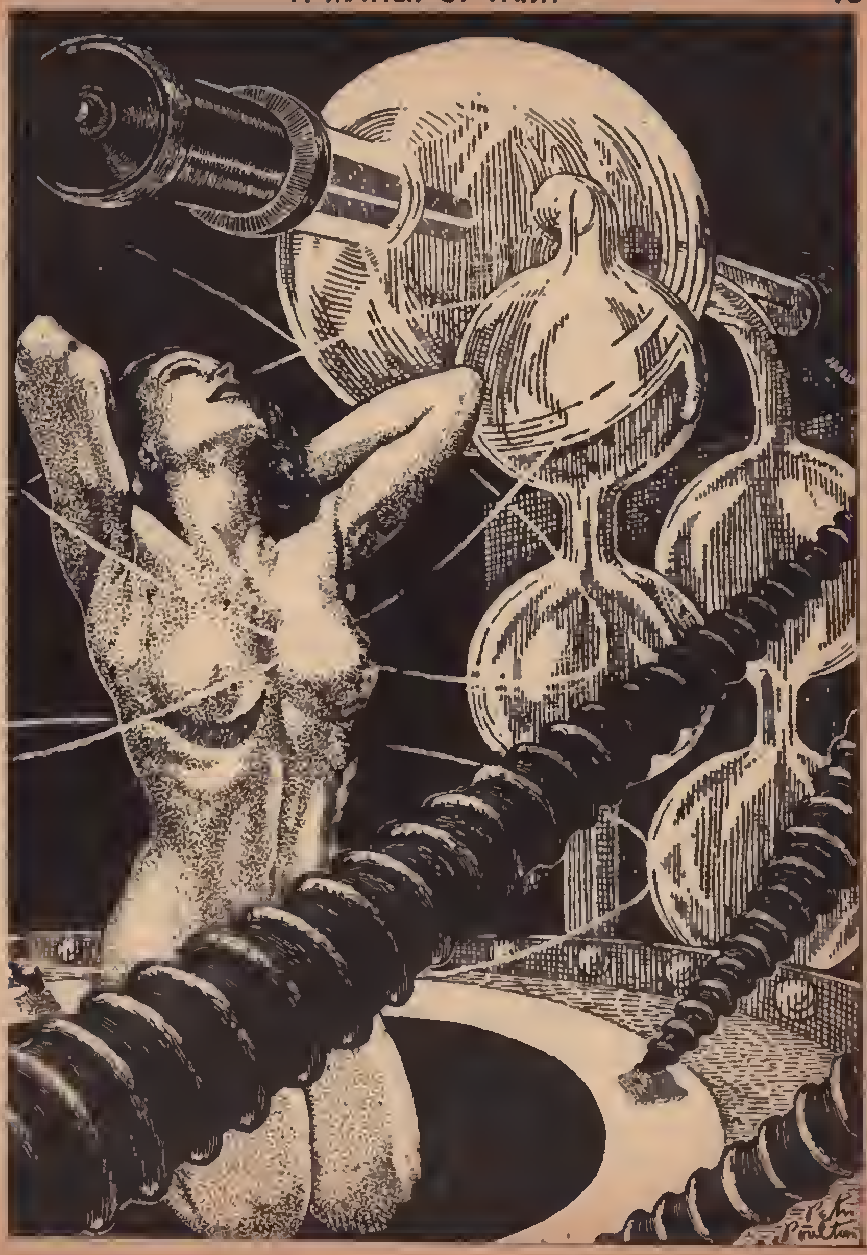
She smiled and beckoned him back to the couch, to stroke his hair. "It will come when Ein wills. Even as our hearts were gladdened in his time, so shall revelation be yours when Ein wills."

The trouble was, he liked it here. He wouldn't have gone back to Earth now, even if a ship awaited him. Even Speewry's getting ready to attack didn't bother him too much. But there was something . . .

Something he knew but didn't know he knew. Those equations had to be the right ones; the machine had to work. But if he could get a look at things, perhaps . . .

He'd better do something, and do it fast, if he didn't want to wind up going to the relative.

A servant entered to announce the Lord'a Designer, and Alanna arose. "I cannot bs seen thus," she said regretfully. "And I



think you would like to speak to the Infidel alone."

"Now, my sweet," Dondyke protested, "I haven't any secrets . . ."

"Not now, perhaps." She shrugged engagingly. "But in time. Oh, don't look so pained, my lord. I wasn't born during this consensus. A woman can become bored, you know, when things are too easy." She kissed him enigmatically. "I want to find out how much I attract you when there is some competition." She left the room while he was still open-mouthed.

Dondyke closed his mouth and grinned. "There's much to he said for the worlds of Ein," he said as his visitor entered.

"Honor to thee, most reverend saint," the Designer greeted him with too wide a grin.

"Most . . . what?"

The Designer made himself comfortable and accepted a drink from the servant. "Oh, you're a saint, all right; you may as well resign yourself to the promotion."

"I thought saints were supposed to be ascetic and rather unsanitary hermits," the Earthling objected.

The official raised his glass. "Not on Grekh. Oh, there are a few mystics who go for the anchorite existence—hut they're usually too old for anything else, anyway. The Son of Grekh humors them so they won't get in the way. If you disapprove, you can vote against them in the next consensus."

"Oh," muttered Dondyke. "And how does that work, if it isn't a state secret."

"It isn't. Very simple. The laws and morals of the planet are determined hy a consensus of the Faithful every year; each brother and sister writes whatever alterations he feels should be made in the laws; since the consensus is made up of people containing the substance of Ein, it cannot be wrong, so the majority wins."

Dondyke lit a pipe interestedly. "You mean actually an honest, democratic election? No votes thrown out, no ballot-boxes stuffed?"

"Strictly on the level. Of course, every True Believer performs an Act of Faith hetween each consensus, and the plebiscite is held among the survivors."

"But what about the malcontents? There must be some who don't like things as they are. What's to prevent them from agitating and swinging others to their way of seeing matters?"

The other took a long drink and stretched. "Ein misguides whom he will. I have noticed

that a man or woman who doesn't fit tends to he faulty in his choice of appropriate Acts of Faith. It looks easy, Dondyke, but a demagogue would find it very difficult to make headway here. Even a few Sons of Grekh have returned to the relative while performing Acts of Faith."

Dondyke started to pace the floor. "That stumps me. I know that theoretically I don't have to choose anything vast and heroic, but I have a feeling that only something hig will he appropriate."

"You always insist upon doing things the hard way. If it was the girl you wanted, you could have gotten her without conversion."

"*Now* he tells me!"

"And the joh would have been intricate enough to hold your interest, I'm sure, although not quite as dangerous. After all, I'm not without companionship. Any woman who is not the wife of a Believer is automatically a maiden, irrespective of her state of innocence. Quite a number of maidens choose the comforting of worthy Infidels as their Act of Faith—always the possibility of making a convert."

He puffed on his pipe. "As long as a maiden's faith is sufficient, the substance of Evil cannot enter her; contrariwise, so long as she shows no sign of being infected with Evil . . . you see? Only legal marriage is ruled out."

"Yeah." Dondyke shrugged. "Alanna has enough between the ears to keep me interested, anyway. She's deferential without being too damn submissive. I'm not exactly used to women being slaves, though, even as well treated as these are."

"Oh, they aren't," said the Designer. "Study the Postulates of Ein and you'll see that women are not to be regarded as inferior. Men are better adapted for some activities, women for others. You'll find quite a few women in business, as a mattsr of fact; they aren't forbidden to eompete with men, although . . ."

"Et cetera," thc Earthling broke in.

Alanna came in, fully dressed, and bowed to the Designer. "I hope you have cheered my lord," she said.

"I am thinking of Speswry, on whom Ein's curse rest," Dondyke told her. He was, too. He'd killed hefore, hut was the murder of a world no worse than killing one man? They meant to destroy Grekh just as thoroughly, of course . . . why should he halk at homicide in self-defense?

"All our days are numbered, beloved," she said. "And if the

day of the Deceiver is on him, should we not praise Ein and be glad?"

But an entire planet!

"Verily," he sighed. "But my heart is sad, Alanna, at the thought of more than a few children of Grekh, who, for various reasons of Faith dwell upon that accursed world. Will our weapons spare them?"

"This is in the hands of Ein, who calls all to him when and how he wills."

"To call them home," put in the Designer, "would be the same as advertising our plans."

"Evil is not entirely ignorant," said the girl, "nor is it powerless, my lord. Were it easy to overcome and were the struggle pleasant at all times, what merit would there be in the victory? They are as safe in Ein's hands there as they are here."

Dondyke lifted his shoulders and let them fall. This was the answer he knew would be forthcoming; it represented the general opinion—the consensus. There could be no partial measures among the Faithful when total annihilation of the enemy was possible. But what would Believers do for tests when all enemies were gone—or had the argument of necessary evil been thrashed out already?

As if he had been reading the Earthling's mind, the Designer said meditatively, "I believe there have been those in the past who wondered if Ein really willed the destruction of all Deceivers. The argument was that there would be nothing further for the Faithful to do."

Alanna smiled. "I remember this from my studies; it troubled me until my instructor assured me that there was a simple answer which I'd see by myself after I'd thought about it more thoroughly."

"I am sure," the Designer put in, "that Dondyke has already deduced it; but alas, lacking Faith and having studied little, it escapes me."

Alanna stroked the Earthling's face. "Surely my lord knows that Ein is greatest and can easily devise new tests for the True Believers when those enemies we see before us have been wiped away. There is no need for us to fret about what such tests may be, or how we should meet them; when the time comes, as Ein wills, then shall we face them."

"Umm, yes," murmured Dondyke. "There's an old saw about the Lord never closing one door before opening another."

"A saying of Unbelievers," she denied. "Pitiful souls who follow a false faith and expect it to do everything for them. We

know, now, that Ein closes and unlocks doors about us, but we must find them ourselves, through Faith and bis will."

Dondyke reached for wine. This had the earmarks of an all-night discussion of Faith.

It was.

IX

In the Designer's quarters, the Earthling could breathe and speak more freely; there seemed to be no spying and listening in upon Honored Infidels—or at least, none of tbe insistent, nagging variety. He could speak freely, so long as no True Believers were in the same room.

"I'm still far from eager for the honor of murdering a planet," he said. "But I haven't any taste for martyrdom, either; if it's my neck or theirs . . ."

The other shrugged. "It would have come about sooner or later. The basic facts are all there, and Terrestrials who've come here in the last few decades have given us the technical details. I might add that it's damned close, Dondyke; Speewry and Pittam aren't far behind us—if they aren't breathing down our necks. Ein knows which will strike first, and under the circumstances I'm for us."

"Yeah. That's the way I ought to feel about it. Something's happened to me, damn it all; maybe I'm losing my sand. If we had to stand off an invasion, it wouldn't bother me, but this push-button stuff . . ."

"Dondyke," the Designer said, "if I were sure that the weapon would actually kill them, my conscience might be troubled, too. But I don't think it will necessarily harm them at all."

"You mean it won't work?"

The Designer lowered his voice. "For our own heads, it had better. I mean I'm not sure they will be killed off. You've seen how the portals appear and disappear; the vibration rate is altered, so that matter becomes immaterial from our standpoint; but when it's brought back, it hasn't been changed in any way that I can see.

"I've managed to experiment with animals. They haven't been harmed. I think most likely the inhabitants of Speewry will just suddenly find themselves somewhere else. They won't know when it happens, and as long as the planet isn't transported into the middle of something or too near or far from another sun, the odds are they won't be harmed. Psychologically, they have built-in protection—Ein has wrought a miracle, to preserve them from the Deceivers of Pittam and . . ." He broke off and tapped his chest.

Dondyke chuckled. "Beautiful. But what is to prevent them from vibrating themselves right back, aa soon as they build their own machine, if they don't already have it?"

"Theoretically, notbing! In actual cases, their chance of discovering the precise vibration phase that sent tbem off in any definite time is just about zero. It's quite a method of disposing of enemies. To the Faithful, they will have bccn shot straight into some sort of limbo."

Dondyke stretched as he got up. "Well, that's some relief. Damn, this living like a prince and saint combined gets dull fast. I'd like it every now and then—but I can't take a ateady diet of it."

"You're suppoaed to be meditating on your Act of Faith, if you don't remember. Time means little to the True Believer; you have until the next consensus—about seven months—although, in your case, I wouldn't overstretcb the meditation."

"I *am* meditating, day and night. Listen, there's something fishy in this business." He told the Designer a carefully modified account of the expedition to Speewry, which managed to include most of what puzzled him. "Doesn't it sound a bit phoney to you?"

The Designer was lost in thought for a while. "I think your first explanation is the most likely. We have a number of spies on Speewry, posing as True Believers of that world; as Acts of Faitb, some have even testified to the Hypothetician of Speewry. There could have been collusion you knew nothing about."

Dondyke shook his head, feeling as if the eggshells all about him were going to crack any moment. "But why couldn't they do as much for one of their own crowd, before this?"

"Did it ever occur to you, Laird, that the man who returned the Equations would automatically become a person of tremendous importance? You thought of it—but you didn't think far enough." He leaned forward. "The equations bad to be recovered, of course—*but by the right person.* If wrong persons chose the mission for an Act of Faith, they had to fail. But no bonor could be too great for Unbelievers, since they would represent no political danger. *Had you declined conversion,* Dondyke, I could predict a great and happy future for you. As tbings are, you're in the balance; you're a popular hero, true, but the question arises of how you'll use your weight. The fact that you are still relatively

ignorant of many fine points of theology, known instinctively by the natives, may save you yet—if you survive!"

"I know some math," the Earthling said. "If I could see the Equations and check them over . . ."

The other shook his head. "Out of the question, I'm afraid."

"And I don't suppose you could give me any kind of hint as to what might be an appropriate Act of Faith?"

"Not at the moment. Dondyke, I'm a lowly Infidel and don't comprehend such fine matters of truth. I mean it; they're beyond me. That's why I never succumbed to the temptation to become converted."

The Earthling considered it for a moment. "Obviously, the Act should be connected with my special talents. Umm, I might be able to assist with the construction. How's it going?"

"It moves along."

"I mean, when will the first tests be made?"

"*Tests?*" The Designer stared at the Earthling as if the latter had lost his reason, then started to laugh. He poured Dondyke some wine, still chortling, wiping away tears with his other hand. "I could blackmail the eyeteeth away from you if I were dishonest," he gasped. "For awhile, you almost had me wondering if you'd really been converted; you nearly convinced me. But if you expect tests to be made . . ."

Dondyke's mouth opened, but no words came out.

"Oh, True Believer," roared the Designer, "how does *anything* that happens come to pass?"

"Why . . . by the will of Ein, of course."

"And how does *everything* happen?"

"By the will of . . . God!" Dondyke gulped his wine hastily and reached for the bottle. "I never thought of that."

"Precisely, unfinished son of Grekh. Anything and everything that happens represents the specific will of Ein at that instant; it does *not* establish a law of nature. There's no such thing as cause and effect, but only one law. Water flows downhill today and the day before and the day before that? Ein willed it, each time; he may not will likewise next time. Chemicals combine? Ein wills it. Repeat it a thousand times and it comes out the same? Well, it *may* be that Ein shall will further repetition, so we will make note of our observations of Ein; but we cannot take them for granted."

"But . . ." protested the Earth-

ling, "how is machinery kept in order here? How can it be kept working? How do you repair it?"

The Designer smiled. "Scientists here spend their lives in observing what Ein has willed in steady sequences; when their Faith is firm, and they ask the right questions, they get the right answers. And the Lord's Engineer has wisely chosen to let Infidels do most of the field work, under the supervision of the Faithful, of course. The sons of Grekh excel in mathematics but they aren't good mechanics, so Unbelievers do most of the construction jobs.

"It's a matter of Faith; those who supervise technics and the Infidels do so as Acts of Faith. I'm afraid, Laird, that if the vibrator doesn't do exactly what is expected of it the very first time—without tests—your career as a member of the consensus will be brief."

"I'm not building it!"

"Nooo. But you delivered the sacred film bearing the basic Equations, and you were an Infidel during most of the period when they were in your possession. You may have practiced some sort of deceit; the best you could hope for is routine execution."

Dondyke frowned. "I thought torture wasn't the fashion here."

"In your case, routine execution might not be regarded as entirely sufficient. Officially, torture doesn't exist, but on rare and special occasions, a condemned man will fall into the hands of indignant citizens." The Designer motioned for silence as the wall glowed and a servant entered bearing a message in a sealed envelope. They waited until the man had departed. "He's supposed to be a mute, but one can never tell; it might be an Act of Faith." He opened the envelope and read the contents.

Dondyke stared into his glass. Then he shrugged. "So I return to my sainthood and my soft living and wait for something to happen. I hope the ability of the vibrator team is on a par with the Faith of their sponsors."

"They're capable enough, and the supervisors have been chosen for their outstanding piety—in proper rituals while the work progresses, that is. And to take notes."

"Then it's all in the hands of Ein. What's the day?"

"Tomorrow. That's what was in the communication. I'm supposed to summon you. Well, you're here, so why not stay? I can offer all manner of diver-

sions—unless you'd rather try more philosophy with Alanna."

Dondyke grinned. "Why not?"

X

Airplanes were unknown in the worlds of Ein, and spaceships were operated only by Unbelievers. But the Lord's Engineer had a dirigible, which was used for occasions of high ceremony. It was ornate, shining gold and decorations on the outside; but the furnishings in the smallish gondola were as simple as those in the Engineer's office.

Dondyke reflected upon his first arrival on Grekh, as well as on Pittam and Speewry. He and Corey had landed in an uninhabited spot and concealed the ship, then made their way into the nearest town on foot. The similarity of experience on all three worlds was that no one among the natives ever questioned him as to whence he came. He was there, and his presence was accepted; only his religion was of interest. In all this time, only Kalin had shown interest in his origin.

And the only differences he'd been able to make out among the True Believers of Grekh, Pittam and Speewry respectively were that each averred they, alone, had been given the True Equations; this and the slight differences in testimony and Postulates of Ein.

Was there another basic difference that didn't show on the surface? Was that what he'd been trying to remember? All he could think of were Corey's words: "It's been too easy . . . we're crowding our luck . . . There is no Lord save Ein, and *unto Pittam were the Equations given.*"

There had been something in Corey's voice then . . . as if he'd been speaking deliberately, intending his words for Dondyke . . .

The dirigible floated in the pastel blue sky of Grekh, and within was the master vibrator—a simple-looking gadget which Dondyke might easily have overlooked under other circumstances. This was the key; other transmitters would amplify the vibration. Its control panel was set up in front of the Lord's Engineer; Dondyke, the Designer, Alanna, and a few servants were the only others present. One of the few video screens on the planet—the device was used only for official communication here—showed the planet Speewry as a globe about as large as the apparent size of Terra's full moon.

The Son of Grekh placed the reel that Dondyke had delivered into a projector and trained it

on a wall surface. "Now, True Believers, and most loyal and honored Infidel, shall we destroy the false world of Speewry, if Ein so wills."

He touched the control, not of the vibrator, but of the projector. Dondyke saw figures, various mathematical symbols, and what looked like paragraphs of connected lines, curves, hooks and circles—all equally meaningless. He sighed, and wondered how much of a ceremony would have to precede the essential business; his glance wandered idly to Alanna.

The girl's face had drained of color; she sat rigid, her fingers gripping the arms of her chair, her eyes flooded with horror.

"Abomination!"

It was the potentate's voice, bristling with fury; his features were contorted as he cut off the projector and glared at the Earthling. Then his face calmed, and Dondyke decided that the fury was better. "Ein deceiveth whom he will, and whom he will he leadeth aright. Dog of a False Follower, did you hope to traduce us with this trick?"

Dondyke turned to the Designer, who also showed distress, then back to the Lord's Engineer. "I don't understand, Your Intellect," he said. "What have I done?"

"Oh you fool, you swaggering, thoughtless fool," sighed the Designer. "What have you done? *This is the wrong script!*"

"Even the Infidel knows," muttered the Son of Grekh. "So he it, then; Ein wills that there be a different ceremony." He looked at the Earthling musingly. "The forces of Evil planned cleverly when they sent you, Dondyke; I too was deceived. Yet it is strange to me that you could hope to mislead us unto the end." He turned to Alanna. "This one must die, my sister, yet we shall not make haste; his deceit was uncovered too easily, and it worries me."

There were tears in the girl's eyes. "Yet his testimony was true; could a Deceiver do thus?"

"But . . . . the Equations!" Dondyke gasped. "The vibrator was constructed from the Equations which had been stolen from Grekh."

"Can't you see it yet, man?" came the tired voice of the Designer. "They knew the Equations all the time; it was the *script;* without the script in which the equations were given unto Grekh, all is meaningless; what you brought back from Speewry were the Equations *in the script of Pittam!*"

And again Dondyke heard

Corey's words: "... *Unto Pittam were the Equations given.*"

"Have you never heard the Extrapolations?" asked the Lord's Designer.

Dondyke thought desperately. "I have studied them, Your Intellect, and though some of them did not make much sense to me, this didn't seem too important; for there are matters that treat with understanding, and matters that treat with faith that believes without understanding. I took it on such faith."

"That was well spoken. Yet your faith is false, Dondyke—even though it is of a measure I have never before seen; there can be only one answer."

"You see, Laird," said Alanna sadly, "the Equations do not rest on cause and effect, as Unbelievers imagine in their ignorance. All that happens is by the will of Ein, and only in the script that he gave to Grekh lies power; without the power in this script, the Equations are meaningless. That is why we fear not destruction from Pittam and Speewry; their script is false and has no potency."

"You mean," Dondyke said slowly, "that it is all a matter of faith."

"Truly," said the Son of Grekh. "And thus are we merciful to Unhelievers, who are more to be pitied for their belief in meaninglessness; we would pity the people of Pittam and Speewry if we knew not that they are creations of the substance of Evil, beings without souls, sent by Ein to test the Faithful."

Dondyke sat stunned, looking vacantly at the now-useless machine before him—useless because it would never be used. Unless the missing roll of film were recovered . . . and even then, he supposed, this particular machine would be destroyed because it had been built under deception.

No wonder he'd been able to steal the film where dozens of others, far more skilled in such matters, had failed.

Faith. Tests of the Faithfull *Acts of Faith!*

He stood up suddenly. "Lord Engineer, is it just to condemn one who has testified truly without a trial?"

"This is never done, Dondyke."

"Then by the cones of Ein," Dondyke cried, his voice ringing in the small room, "I demand a trial—a trial of Faith. Tbis is my Act of Faith, O Son of Grekh, for what was dark to me has become lighted. I cannot say how I know this, for Ein reveals not all things to any man, but this I know: that vibrator

before us will destroy Speewry."

"Blasphemy, Earthling," said the Designer, wearily.

"I call on the Protector of the Faithful," Dondyke repeated. "Make the test—turn on the vibrator. If it works, then Ein has shown his will in a mysterious way and through his instrument, Laird Dondyke. If not, then truly I am a Deceiver."

The Lord's Engineer pondered for a moment. "It is entirely without precedent. Yet as an Act of Faith . . ."

"Surely," said Alanna, "we can leave it in the hands of Ein."

". . . yet there can be no limitation upon the will of Ein. It shall be as you say."

"The vibrator," Dondyke asked, "was built according to the text of the true equations, was it not?"

"It was."

"And under the supervision of True Believers?"

"Even so."

Dondyke lifted his hands and let them fall. "Then I am content."

The Lord's Engineer motioned to one of the servants, who twisted a dial on the video screen, bringing the image of Speewry into greater magnification. Then the Son of Grekh threw the control switch, which set numerous other vibrators into operation all over Grekh.

All they needed now was one slight miracle, Dondyke thought.

In the screen, the planet Speewry loomed; then, it began to blur, and as they watched, fade slowly. Finally, it disappeared altogether.

The Lord's Engineer arose, standing before Dondyke, and made the infinity symbol. "Praise unto Ein, who exalteth whom he will, and whom he will he maketh bend low. I acknowledge thee, Dondyke, Son of Ein, whose faith passeth belief, and petition thee to be on my left hand, as my loyal Designer is on my right."

"Accept," whispered the Designer.

"As Ein wills, I accept," the Earthling answered. The ruler bowed, then went into another room in the gondola, which was now heading for the palace.

Dondyke found his arms full of Alanna, but he turned to the Designer first. "Well—it worked. But look . . . what does this Son of Ein business mean? Or didn't he capitalize it?"

The other chuckled. "He capped it, so to speak. It means, roughly, that he's quitting before he gets behind. You came through on an Act of Faith which actually negates all the basis of the Faith. He's too

smart to reject it, and getting rid of Speewry was too valuable a service to be overlooked. He wants you on his side, but he doesn't want any more such radical Acts of Faith—so he made you Son of Ein."

"Your faith has been established once and for all; no more tests are required."

The girl looked up at Dondyke. "You will have philosophers and theologicians busy for a century, my lord, explaining. But it is no paradox; it only seems that way to us now."

Dondyke shook bis head. Had the Lord's Engineer really believed that the vibrator wouldn't work? He was clever; he knew when to yield gracefully and make it look like a triumph of diplomacy.

"I don't know about that," he said, "but there's something I'd like to know. Will someone please tell me—*what is the true script?*"

The Designer stroked his short beard. "There is a small volume in the library, looked upon as a curio, which no one can read since it's written in the form of English. It tells about an expedition to a far-away world, and of tbe preparations for it; they wanted records of all aspects of the culture, and these were put on microfilm. That made for a minimum weight and space occupied; records were made in triplicate, and a copy of the complete set was on each of three ships.

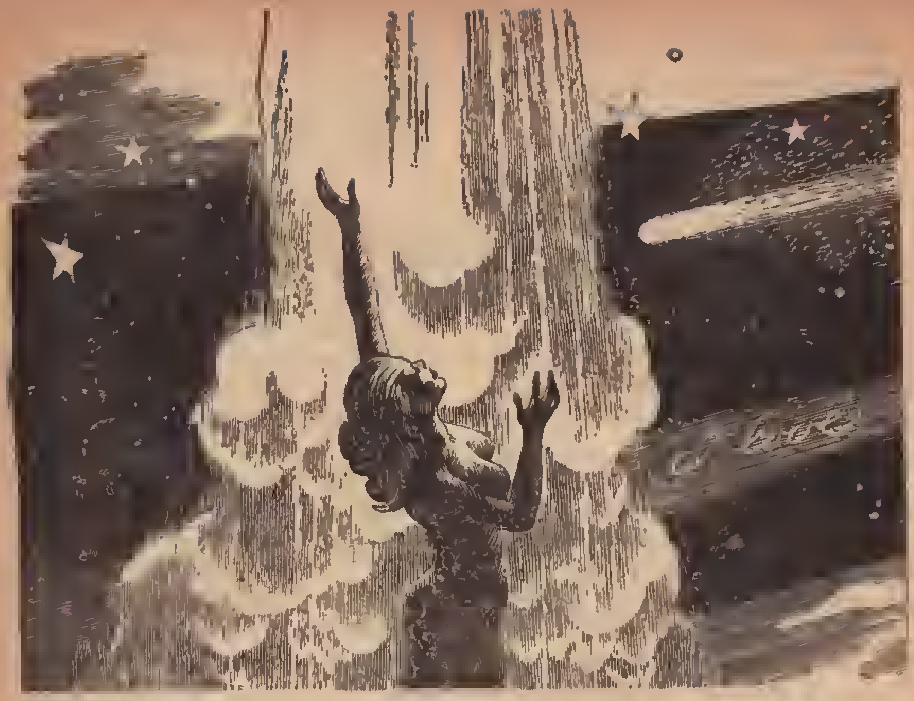
"Now, in order to conserve space and weight further, these records—outside of figures and symbols—were made in the shortest methods of writing they knew—the language was reduced to shorthand, in three different systems: Gregg, Pittman and Speedwriting."

Dondyke laughed, all the tension releasing itself in one burst of mirth. "I can guess the rest of the story; the time came when the question arose as to which of the three scripts was the original, true one. Tbe people had completely forgotten what written English looked like. So they warred over shorthand systems!"

The Designer coughed gently. "An interesting work of fiction, of course; perbaps it is just as well that it has never been translated."

"But a romantic tale could cause no harm," Alanna protested. "For surely, Ein . . ."

Dondyke cut her off as efficiently and enjoyably as possible. "Enough of philosophy and theology for now. If Ein wills revelation, that will come to me. This is my world now, and the Son of Ein takes what the Lord sends him on Faith!"



THE BARRIER

BY MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrated by ORBAN

Men proved once that the speed of sound was a barrier which no airplane could crack. It took new ideas, tough men, and a lot of time to beat it. Then men got out of the atmosphere where a worse barrier was waiting. They knew that ships had to go faster than light to reach the stars. It's a lot tougher to beat the speed of light than to crack the sonic barrier. It would take a hero to do that—or the world's number one prize fool!

I get a laugh out of the way they tell the story of how Joe Harper broke the Barrier. All the visicasts carry it on the anniversary of the *Star Pup's* return. There's a big, full-hour program about it, and schoolkids have to watch it for school credit, and all that day the comedians make cracks about it, and they fly flags at half-mast and have ceremonies yapping about it. Joe Harper broke the Barrier, they say, and he's a planetary hero—the first one—and Bill Todd makes a speech and says what a good guy Joe Harper was, and how everybody wishes he'd lived, and they hold Joe Harper up for all the kids to model themselves by. They say with proud and wistful grief that they can't build a memorial over his grave, but that every Earth-colony in the skies is his memorial. They say a lot of things like that.

I knew Joe Harper. I knew him when. I knew him better than anybody else who ever lived. I know more about him than anybody who makes speeches or writes the visicasts for the anniversary of the

Breaking of the Barrier. I know!

The Barrier was space, of course. It was the distance between Earth and the nearest star. It was the difference between the distance to the Moon —we could make that then—and Alpha Centaurus. It was less than two light-seconds to the Moon. It was four and a half light-years to Alpha Centaurus.

I'm not going to spoil the story. When I kick off, this goes to the Joseph Harper Memorial Fund—which educates boys who can't swing it themselves. They can use it or not, just as they please. If they give a damn about actual facts they'll publish it, though. This is the truth about this precious hero of theirs, Joe Harper.

It was the Bessenden Comet that started it. If you're more than a kid you'll remember. It was a comet that they picked up on the Moon Observatory telescopes first. They'd already spotted two planets of Alpha Centaurus, then. They picked up Bessenden's Comet a half-light year out. It took plenty long to arrive. By the time it was a naked-eye object they had its orbit figured, and they were shivering with joy. It came in and swung around the sun, and they checked some more, and then they went crazy with excitement.

There were three good reasons. One was that Bessenden's Comet didn't visit our sun only. It had a closed orbit, of course, and our Sun was at one end of it, but Alpha Centauri was at the other. It made a round trip between them every twenty-three zillion zillion years.

That was one excuse for going nuts. Another was the spectrum of its tail. There was some stuff in it that didn't fit into the periodic table. It had atoms with double nuclei. Like double suns. Two nuclei spinning around each other, and the planetary electrons running around outside. The physicists went out of their minds, figuring out what it would mean. They called the stuff hessendium, after the guy who'd picked out the comet on a photographic plate in the first place. He never did anything else of any importance in all his life. The third reason for excitement was the news that Earth was due to pass through the comet's track in just three months.

That meant there might be meteoric falls of the same stuff the comet was made of. Meteors go barging around in the orbits of comets. The Leonids and the August meteors do, anyhow. Maybe some scrap from this comet would fall.

The physicists started showing their figures to the big-money boys. By the time we were ready to pass through the comet's trail there was an offer of a thousand dollars a gram for any meteoric material from the comet. And you could write a book about that night with everybody watching for millions to fall from the sky!

A half-ounce piece fell in the middle of Rio de Janeiro. A fireball exploded over Lake Erie, and three pieces fell on shore. There was a fall in Kamchatka—sixty pieces, total weight twenty-three pounds. Up near the Moon Observatory they got another piece. With all the earth watching here and on the moon besides, there were less than thirty pounds of meteoric material picked up—and there was less than an ounce and a half of pure bessendium in it. That was where Joe Harper came in.

He'd been working on rockets. He was the one who worked out compound-explosion rocket-motors, and got forty thousand feet exhaust-velocity for the first time. The big-money boys were putting up for something big, and they wanted him to design the engines. They were going to build a space-ship with their ounce and a half of bessendium. Because bessendium turned out to be an atomic catalyst. You could get controlled atomic energy out of anything from lead to mushroom soup if you had as much as an ounce and a quarter of bessendium. You couldn't use less. There was a critical mass for catalysis, like there's a critical mass for a bomb. They could make one ship. Just one. They could never make another ship unless they got some more bessendium. And they called in Joe to build the drive.

You've heard the stuff about him. Poor boy, self-educated, brilliant mind, genius for seeing into the heart of things, high ideals, chivalrous—everything a planetary hero ought to be. Sure! That's what the visicasts say. Let's skip that hogwash. The compound-explosion rocket-motor was only a twist on the principle of the long-barreled cannon. He got it from the Big Bertha that bombarded Paris from seventy miles, back in 1917-1918, fifty years before he was born. Of course he had to work out a tricky electronic-circuit cooling-system to keep his engine from melting. It turned waste heat to electricity, and they use that to generate current on Earth, right now.

They were going to use the *Star Pup* to go to Mars. A quick petrological exploration — for traces of bessendium—and they would push off for Saturn's

rings. If that failed they'd start checking over the asteroids, one by one, for bessendium. Earth had the stuff to make one atomic-drive ship. Just one. No more. They had to use it to try to find more stuff for more ships. And Joe Harper designed the *Star Pup's* engines.

He did a good job on those engines. You can give him that. They were good engines. But he put something over on the rest of the designing crew. Those engines could have pulled the *Star Pup* straight out from the sun. They could accelerate the ship at forty-seven gravities. If you figure what forty-seven gravities would do to anybody inside the ship, you'll see how often it would be used!

The funny thing was that nobody realized it while the ship was building. Not even Bill Todd—but he was an astronomer. Nobody got it but Lila Hunt, who was the biological designer; she worked on the air-freshener and ozone apparatus and the interior environment to keep the crew from cracking up from space-nerves. A nice-looking girl, Lila. A little bit on the tall side, but she had good eyes and plenty of brain-cells working, and she was a human being besides. Even she didn't really tumble until they'd finished putting on the *Star Pup's* outer plating and were working on the outer helix.

Joe Harper was puttering around on top of the hull, watching the workmen mold-welding the silver conductor-bars from the cooling circuit. The *Star Pup* was funny-looking. Her rockets were outside her skin. There was a helix of heavy silver bar around the whole hull. It was supposed to be communication-stuff. Lila watched Joe raising hell with workmen fixing up a weld. They had blueprints and a wiring-diagram, and they argued with him. He took the diagram and changed it and signed the change. He snapped.

"That puts you in the clear! Go ahead and fix it my way!"

Then Lila said:

"Joe."

He climbed down from the hull and went to her. He liked her a lot, Joe did. She was a couple of inches taller than he was, but he thought about her a lot when he should have been doing something more sensible. He never made any passes at her, though. He was conceited, but not that conceited! He knew she wouldn't look at him. So he acted curt and hard-boiled to her, but he always thought over everything she'd said, afterward, just liking to remember the way she looked and how her voice sounded.

This time, when he climbed down off the *Star Pup*, she smiled at him and said, "Joe, those engines are too big. I've been reading up. You had an article in the last *Electronics Engineering*. I studied it."

"Why?" asked Joe. Pretty stupid. A girl doesn't read a technical article outside her field unless it's by a man she wants to understand.

"Oh, I like to read what my friends publish," said Lila. "But those engines are big! You'd never dare turn them on full, according to the figures in your article. You're putting something over. Come have lunch with me and tell me about it, will you?"

He pretended to hesitate, but he went to the commissary of the moonship yard where all the rockets that had ever gone to the moon had been built—but the *Star Pup* was the first one ever built to go farther. A moon-rocket could get to Mars, but it would have to coast eight months, and carry eight months of food for the crew that went along—and then it couldn't get back. So nobody'd gone. No use in it. Joe and Lila found a table and sat down.

"So I'm putting something over!" said Joe. "What?"

"I wouldn't know," admitted Lila. She smiled at him very nicely. "But if you turned on your engines full-power you'd kill everybody in the ship unless you turned on the coolers full power. Then you wouldn't get much drive, but you'd draw off a couple of hundred thousand kilowatts of power. Maybe more."

"So what?" said Joe, challenging.

"So what are you going to do with two hundred thousand kilowatts of power, out in space?" asked Lila.

"It's three hundred thousand," said Joe. He ordered a meal, for her and himself, and said, "I want to try something."

"To try melting the ship?" asked Lila. She said softly, "Tell me, Joe. The engines are in. It's too late to tear them out. I won't tell. What do you want to try?"

"You saw the helix outside the hull," said Joe. "It's half-inch silver bars, to send radio signals and pick them up, they say. Quite a loop. What'd happen if you sent three hundred thousand kilowatts through that helix—four hundred thousand horsepower?"

"Wouldn't they blow?" asked Lila. She watched his face.

"Not if they were cold enough," Joe told her, "Not at four degrees Kelvin. That's the temperature out there. Silver's a superconductor there—zero re-

sistance. They wouldn't blow. They'd carry the current. What would happen?"

Lila thought it over. She shook her head. It was queer, this stuff. He talked technicalities and noticed the way she smiled and thought about that. She talked technicalities and smiled at him in a strictly untechnical way.

"All I can see is that there'd be the strongest magnetic field anybody even thought about," ahe said. "What good would that be to a space-ship enclosed in it?"

"Take a thing that makes heat," said Joe, noticing that her hair had funny little golden lights in it. "A resistance-wire, say. Put in enough power and it stops making heat. It gives light. Put in more power and if it didn't blow it'd stop making light. It'd give off ultra-violet and X-rays. Put in still more, and if anything could take it, it'd give cosmics. Right?"

She nodded.

"Take a coil that'll make a magnetic field," said Joe. "Put in enough power, so it's not magnetism any more. What'll it be?"

"What would it be?" she asked, surprised into paying attention to what he was saying, instead of just to him.

"I want to find out," he told her, grinning. Then he said: "You're a good-looking girl, Lila."

"Ah!" she said, making it sound like half a joke. "Come up to my house tonight and tell me that again!"

"You'd pump me," he said wisely. "About what I think that field would be. I don't fall for that."

"I might want you to tell me I'm good-looking," she protested.

"Not with Bill Todd hanging around."

She said very firmly indeed, her eyes anxious, "He hasn't any mortgage on me! I'd like you to come, Joe. I—you never have talked to me about anything but work."

"And I won't," said Joe. "Not until I get rich. Remember my cooling-circuit for my rockets?"

She nodded. That was a bad deal that Joe Harper got. It made him the fool he turned out to be. But of course, if he hadn't been something of a half-wit to start with, it wouldn't.

"I never did appeal to girls," said Joe deliberately. "I was pretty well resigned to it. Then I met a girl who seemed to fall for me, hard. She liked to talk about my work, even. I was figuring out that cooling-circuit, then, and I bragged about it to her. I drew the circuit for her to admire. She admired it a lot.

She admired it so much that she carefully took my sketches and a tape-recording of what I'd said about it to the corporation that patented it and is making very nice dividends from it. They're building all the new power-plants on earth with my circuit. But I didn't get anything out of it. I guess the girl did, though."

Lila knew it had been taken from him, of course. She'd never known how. It was one of those things that couldn't be proved.

"Do you think I'd do that?" she asked, hurt.

"I wouldn't take the chance," he told her. "That's all."

"That's hardly a nice thing to say to me," she protested.

"I know," he agreed. "It isn't nice. But I said it."

She bit her lips.

"If that's why you act as you do, Joe," said Lila quietly, "—because some girl did you a dirty trick—I'll promise not to say one word about work or the *Star Pup*. I would like you to like me, Joe. I've tried to make you."

She looked like she meant it, and he was tempted. This was in the commissary restaurant. She was the prettiest girl in the room. He liked her better than he'd ever liked anybody else. But he'd been hit hard. He'd made a bitter resolve never to be fooled again by a girl. He would have given Lila his left arm and leg, if it would have done her any good. But be couldn't trust anybody. He couldn't tell the difference between Lila and the kind of girl who could be hired to make a fool of him.

"I'll tell you," he said. He grinned, but he meant it. "If my trick is what I think it is, I'll get a lot richer than that cooling-circuit ever would have made me. I've got you in my mind. When I'm rich, I'll come and ask you to marry me. I mean it," he added. "That's what I want."

Then Lila went pale. She said very quietly, "I think you mean that, Joe. You're just crazy enough to mean it. But I'm crazy too, in my own way. I've been telling myself I was in love with you. I've been making passes at you in a ladylike way. Now that you've said this—I'd marry you tomorrow if you asked me. Right now. But if you dodged me until you got rich—not trusting me—and then came . . . I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world!"

Then she got up and went out of the commissary, fast. Joe looked after her. He felt rotten. He had an idea that she hoped he'd come over to her house that night. But he was not the bril-

liant, impulsive, splendidly normal character the visicasts say he was. He didn't go. Next day he saw her at the moonship yard. He nodded how-do. She turned away. He was sorry, but he was that kind of a fool. He didn't know what to do.

Then he had that run-in with Bill Todd. The *Star Pup* was pretty nearly finished, and Bill was feeling good. He was the official head of the organization that had bought up all the bessendium from the meteoric falls, he was in over-all charge of designing and building the *Star Pup*, and he'd be her skipper. An astronomer, Bill Todd. Big and handsome, and he could turn on the charm and make a swell speech before a woman's club or a banker's luncheon. He liked Lila.

All of a sudden he came to Joe Harper and said angrily, "Look here, Joe! What's this about Lila?"

Joe was working, then. He was making an instrument to go on the *Star Pup*, and it was tricky adjusting it, because all he had to go on was theory. He was irritable because he couldn't have any of the stuff it was supposed to measure to calibrate it by.

"What about Lila?" he asked.

"She told me she's not sure she'll sign on the *Star Pup* for the cruise. Even the try-out cruise! I asked her what was the matter and she said you wouldn't want her along. If you think you can decide who makes up the crew of the *Star Pup* . . . I raised the money for that ship! I'm to be her skipper! If I want Lila in the crew, she's in the crew!"

"All right," said Joe. "She's in the crew, then."

He was having trouble with his work. He was fretting. And Bill Todd was a nuisance.

Bill said more angrily still, "You're a good engine man, Joe, but don't get any ideas! You're not the boss of this business! If you've got something on your mind, you can say it right now!"

Joe turned from his workbench and snapped, "The scheme is crazy! It's crazy to hunt for bessendium on Mars. Erosion has pulled it down flat and covered over all its rocks anyhow. It's crazy to hunt for bessendium in Saturn's rings. It makes a nice dramatic picture, but the specific gravity's low. There won't be any heavy elements like bessendium. If there's any in this solar system it'll be on Mercury, but I don't think there is. The comet came from Centaurus. I don't believe there's an atom of bessendium closer than that! It would take some freak conditions to make a double-nucleus atom! We'd have found it on

Earth if there were any around. Earth's got the best assortment of elements any planet has. It could be on Mercury—but not anywhere else. I think it'll have to be found in the Centaurus system."

Bill Todd said, "Ambitious, you are! It'd take six years, counting acceleration and deceleration, to get to Centaurus at point eight light-speed. That's the best the *Star Pup* could do with all the time it needed for acceleration. And the crew would starve on the way. Six years each way? You're the one who's crazy!"

"Want to bet?" asked Joe.

"I do not want to bet," said Bill Todd with dignity. "I want you to attend to your part of this business and leave the rest—including the selection of the crew—to me!"

"Else I'm likely to be left out, eh?" asked Joe.

"Figure it yourself!" said Bill.

Joe went back to his instrument. Bill Todd was a pretty good astronomer. He could raise money and give a charming lecture, and he was good at changing the photographic plates in a telescope. He stood there, watching Joe belligerently.

"And I want Lila on the *Star Pup!*" he said firmly. "That's settled!"

He stalked away, leaving Joe to figure it out. And Joe figured. He could see through Bill Todd easily enough. Bill was the sort to gloat over being skipper of the first ship to land on Mars, and the first to touch the rings of Saturn—nobody'd want to land on Saturn—and he was the fair-haired boy who would revel in being the hero of the first romance out in space. He'd love the visiscreen appearances he'd be asked to make as a great scientist and a great lover, holding the hand of the girl he'd won with Saturn filling half the universe as he told her of his love . . . Sure! Even Joe could figure that one out.

He saw Lila next day. He went up to her and said, "You told Bill you want me left behind? Why?"

"I didn't say that," said Lila quietly. "I said I might not go along myself. I don't think it's a good idea to have a crew of a ship not able to trust each other."

Joe said coldly, "All right. Suppose I put three hundred thousand kilowatts through that helix. It'll be as much more than magnetism as light or X-rays is more than heat. It'll be a stress in space, of course. It'll be a new kind of stress in space. I think it'll make a field in which the speed of light will go up out of

sight, and a field that can travel at that speed. I think it'll give the *Star Pup* a faster than-light drive. Is that what you want to know? You wanted me to trust you. I've told you. Satisfied?"

She shook her head.

"That's not what I want you to say," she said in a low tone.

"I've got to be part of the crew," said Joe practically, "to find out if that works. I might be wrong. It might blow us to hellandgone. I'd rather you stayed behind."

"Why?" asked Lila bitterly. "Nobody cares if I go on a dangerous expedition!"

"I do," said Joe. He meant it.

"If you'll ask me," said Lila, "I'll go with you and be with you when you try it. I'll even help you do it without the others knowing—because they wouldn't let you. That's not right, but I'll do it. You haven't the right to risk their lives without their consent, but I'll help you do that—if you say what I want you to say."

Joe shrugged.

"They'd never agree," he told her. "Besides, there's the bessendium. It's all there is. Bill wouldn't risk either his neck or the bessendium except for glory. He'd never risk both."

"I will," said Lila. "But you've got to ask me to. Joe, haven't you ever wanted anybody to be part of you? To share everything with you? Even danger?"

"No," said Joe. "Not danger. If I get a lot of money I'll want to share that with you."

"You're crazy!" cried Lila fiercely. "I won't let you do it! I'll tell Bill Todd what you intend! I'll stop you!"

She ran away. He didn't run after her. He just stared where she'd vanished. Plain stupid.

He took off in the *Star Pup*, alone, two days before the ship was officially finished. It was practically done, of course. The air-plant was in, and the heaters, and the fuel was loaded—but anything would do for fuel. The bessendium was in its place, built in. Joe Harper went to the ship and got a workman to help him get a couple of heavy cases inside. Said it was instruments for testing the rockets. Then he got all the workmen away. He was going to test the rockets.

He tried them. One by one, at minimum power, he set every one at work. But even so, they made a noise that was something to crack a man's ear-drums. The noise was terrific. It went beyond the moonship yard. It filled the offices. It was a growling, snarling thunder. Lila heard it. She turned her head, going white. Bill Todd was talking to her at the time.

"Who's turned on the rockets?" she demanded, white as chalk.

"Joe," said Bill, easily. "He told me he was going to make a check. Just routine. You didn't tell him he'd have to stay behind, did you?"

Lila didn't answer. She was out the door. She ran. She ran down the steps and into the yard, and she ran crazily toward the *Star Pup*, sobbing as she ran and blubbering, "Joe! Joe! Wait for me!"

Somebody tried to stop her when she was a couple of hundred yards of the ship. She dodged them, and ran down a lane of unscorched ground where the rocket-flames didn't touch. She saw the ports were closed. The entrance-port closed as she got to the ship's side. It seemed like Joe had closed it in her face, but actually he'd done it from the control-room. She pounded on it with her fists, crying, "Joe! Joe! Let me in!" The booming of ten thousand thunders was in her ears.

Then the ship up-ended and went away from there with as many of the forty-seven gravities that its engines could give as Joe dared put into them. There was a flash, and it was darting up. It went up into the sky. It was out of sight in seconds. And there wasn't anything where it had been. Not anything.

So Joe went to Centaurus. They got word to the Moon Observatory, and they got a telescope trained on the *Star Pup* and saw it head out. Joe put it through all its paces on atomic-rocket drive. Very conscientious, he was. Then he lined up for Alpha Centaurus—and suddenly the ship wasn't there. He'd waited, watching the outside temperature, until the silver helix was down to four degrees Kelvin and it didn't have any resistance at all. Then he turned on the engines and the cooler full power. Three hundred thousand kilowatts went into the helix. There was hardly any power left as rocket-thrust, but there was enough. The magnetic field became something else. It became an area of stress in which the speed of light went away up—and therefore an area in which the *Star Pup* could travel hundreds of times faster than in normal space. The stress went ahead of the *Star Pup*. She went out of sight. There wasn't even a streak of ions left behind that anybody could see. There was a streak, but the ions were too far apart. Miles and miles apart.

The *Star Pup* had cracked the Barrier.

He was gone something over three weeks, living on the food he'd gotten into the ship in those

two cases he'd said were instruments. Then, one day, the *Star Pup* winked into being again. She came on toward Earth. The radio receivers at the Moon Observatory picked up this message.

"Star Pup *reporting back from Alpha Centaurus planet two,*" was the message. "*Have nearly ton bessendium ore for cargo. Contact Lila Hunt care of moonship yard* Star Pup *project. Message for her: quote, I know what I should have said. I say it. I love you. We'll get married please. Unquote.*"

The Moon Observatory relayed the message to Earth, while the *Star Pup* came on. They went crazy down there, of course. But Bill Todd phrased the message back to Joe. He did a beautiful job of it.

It told Joe that Lila had been in the blast-area when he took off. It had been quick. That was the blessed part of it. It didn't last the thousandth of a second.

Joe went out of his mind, out there in the *Star Pup*, heading for Earth. There was a time when he started to head for the Sun and dive in it. But that wasn't fair. So he landed on Earth.

But Joe got one break. The only break he ever got out of the whole business. He set the *Star Pup* down. The minute she was on the ground the planes hovering around broke all barriers and came swooping over to see the *Star Pup* close. Joe got out of the ship and began to run. He wanted to hide. He didn't want to be a hero. And he got his break.

A four-passenger job collided with a light plane and they started to fall; they gathered up two other planes on the way down. They landed at the very edge of the crowd that was rushing out on the field to mob Joe for being a hero. They blew up when they hit. There were eighty-some people killed, right away, and some hundreds burnt or injured in the crush. They never found Joe's body. They never found Joe.

When they picked me out of the mess and hauled me to the hospital with all the other injured, I was burnt pretty badly. The first thing they asked me was, "What's your name?"

I told them, "John Smith." I didn't want to be a hero. I wanted to hide. I wanted not to remember anything. I was pretty bitter because I didn't die. It was three months before they turned me out of the hospital, and then nobody would have recognized me anyhow. So that's that.

Joe Harper wasn't any hero. He was a damn fool. I should know. I used to be him.

(Continued from page 65)

advantage on a plotter. Caught between the two factions, Danny is forced to develop himself faster than he should, and the result leaves the reader both breathless and sympathetic; the air of something hanging slightly out of reach makes good story as Danny is drawn or thrust into worlds real and unreal on the way to final success.

THE WEAPON MAKERS by A. E. Van Vogt. Greenberg: Publisher, $2.75 • Originally serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction*. The Van Vogt method of writing in six hundred word blocks and introducing a new concept in each block all too often leaves the reader with the scrambled impression of having waded through six or eight manuscripts shuffled by a tornado. Van Vogt has rewritten and reduced the razzle-dazzle by a factor of two: The Immortal Robert Hedrock is now playing only four ends against the middle.

Robert Hedrock puts the ambitious Weapon Makers in their rightful place, solves the faster-than-light space drive, meets a sight-seeing spider-race and talks them into helping to find a missing twin brother for a man who has no part in the story, and finally weds the lovely Empress Inneldo of Isher. (Being the Immortal Robert Hedrack, he also founded the House of Isher and has been marrying its empresses every hundred years or so to keep the Isher Line pure. Hedrock also set up the Weapon Shops to stand as a loyal opposition to the monarchy. Busy fellow, Hedrock!)

INVADERS OF EARTH edited by Groff Conklin. Vanguard Press, $2.95 • Anthologies seem to be taking trends; this one deals exclusively with stories about various invasions of the Earth, including the one performed by Orsan Welles. The book bulks well (333 pages) and it reads well. A good collection.

There aren't, unhappily, any science non-fiction books to be reviewed this month. However, as a closing note of interest, Willy Ley and Chesley Bonestell will see their "Conquest of Space" published in Germany by the time you read this. That makes seven languages so far. May be eight; no one knows what is being printed with changes far an Iran Curtain slant!

WITH WINGS

BY JOHN JAKES

Illustrated by SCHECTERSON

DONALDSON, the artist from next door, pushed down the tobacco in his pipe and stuck the yellow pouch back in his pocket. His long legs stuck out from his chair awkwardly, apologetically. He watched the slate-gray afternoon sky beyond the window of the living room and sucked on his pipe without lighting it.

"I don't know if I can help you, Mrs. Ketch," he said at last. "Really, I'm only a painter of magazine covers."

Mrs. Ketch sat still in her chair, watching him. The lines that had come into her face too early seemed to be etched deeper by the black, fading light. "You might understand," she said. "You might be able to tell me what to do." From outside came the wild squeal of small children playing.

"Well," said Donaldson hesitantly, wishing he were free of his paints and a certain blonde woman, "I'll do what I can."

"I suppose you wonder what we keep locked up in the west bedroom," she said nervously, "what with the blinds down all the time."

"That has puzzled me," Donaldson said.

She put her fingers together tightly, held them together that way and said, "I have a child."

Donaldson laughed, attempting to be hearty. "That certainly is a surprise. You've been living next to me for six months and I've never seen him. . . ." He hesitated, confused. ". . . her . . . or. . . ."

"A boy, Mr. Donaldson."

"Yes, well, I still don't see any problem."

Her mouth twisted up wearily. "But there is. My husband worked in the New Mexico desert for three years. You knew he was a physicist." She hurried on while Donaldson nodded. "We found out after I was pregnant that we had both been infected by the radiation. Do you know anything about science?"

Donaldson stared at the rug. "I know . . . enough. Your child is one of those . . . the papers talked about?" He caught himself, cursing terribly, silently, for the blunder.

"A mutant, Mr. Donaldson. A freak. That's what he was called before we moved here. So I've kept him locked up. He's never seen the outside. But I can't keep him in there forever, Mr. Donaldson!"

He nodded again. "Could I . . . see him?"

"You really want to? You won't think he . . . he's wrong?"

"No," said Donaldson very quietly, "no."

THEY walked through the hall toward the door of the west bedroom while Mrs. Ketch talked about how her husband had died of the radiation and how she and her child had barely survived, and how the doctor that delivered the baby was sworn to secrecy.

She took a key from a chain around her neck and unlocked the door and pushed it open. Donaldson looked, and put his hand on the door frame.

The boy played on a thickly covered floor. All around the walls were sunlamps, shining down on him. The blinds were closed.

The boy stood up on his fat legs and looked at them. Donaldson shivered. The child's eyes were peculiar and large, with a certain terrible emptiness to them. He took a couple of steps and turned.

Through two holes cut in

the back of his blue knit shirt protruded a pair of small white wings.

Donaldson just stared while the child ran around in the glare of the sunlamps, waving his hands. The wings quivered slightly.

"Oh," said Donaldson.

Mrs. Ketch whispered to him, "He wants to fly. That's what he wants. He knows, somehow, what the wings are for, and he wants to fly."

Donaldson pulled the door shut quickly. "How old is he?"

"Six."

Donaldson spoke in broken phrases, thinking aloud, incoherently. "He'd find out soon enough what it was like. They'd ridicule him, but that wouldn't make any difference. Mrs. Ketch, your child isn't a freak. That little boy is something better. I know it. I don't know how I know it. I feel it, perhaps." He passed a hand across his forehead.

"You think I should let him go outside, in the world?" She was incredulous.

"Yes, yes. Forget the mob. Forget the stupid ones that talk the loudest and are always wrong." He thought about his paints and a certain blonde woman. "Turn him loose."

She laughed once, shortly. She went back into the room and brought the boy out with her. He smiled shyly at Donaldson, who stood marvelling at the soft texture of the wings.

They went to the kitchen door, surveyed the back yard with its spike-topped iron fence, the garage, the lawn. At least a dozen children were playing in the next yard, where a tree like a naked black claw jutted into the afternoon sky.

Donaldson opened the door, full of sudden exultation.

"Let him go," he said. "Let him learn to be free. Let him go and play with the other children."

MRS. Ketch, afraid, but sensing purpose in the artist's voice, opened the back door, pointed to the next yard, and whispered something in the boy's ear. He went down the steps, across the yard and through the gate in the spiked fence.

"Look at him," Donaldson breathed. "Upright, strong. He doesn't even know what fear is."

Mrs. Ketch had her hand wound around the doorknob. The other children saw the boy. They stopped their playing. They were curious. They bumped each other. They

crowded around him. Donaldson waited breathlessly. And through the pane of the porch window sounded a high, shrill laugh.

"That's it," Donaldson said. "The mob is coming up in them. They're afraid because he's different than they are and they know it, so they have to laugh at him. But he won't move."

He didn't. He stood, with his peculiar eyes wide, and the wings quivering.

The laughter was a horrible chorus. The children were jostling the boy. He did not fight back. There were screams of, "Let him fly, throw him over the fence, freak, freak, freak. . . ."

SOME of the boys had picked up the boy who did not fight. Mrs. Ketch jerked the door open. Donaldson's hand closed over her wrist. "Wait a minute. Let him win. He'll win over them."

There was doubt behind Donaldson's eyes.

The boys threw Mrs. Ketch's child up and up, directly over the fence. He moved his wings hesitantly, and they sustained him for an almost imperceptible moment, when he hung suspended against the slate sky.

"Fly," Donaldson's mouth said, making no sound, "fly, fly, fly. . . ."

The child began to fall.

Mrs. Ketch cried out.

Donaldson mumbled, "I thought he could win. . . ."

The child fell down, fluttering his wings helplessly, innocently. There was no fear on his face. He fell down toward the fence.

The iron spikes were waiting.

COMING EVENTS

Seemingly, the surest way to win a complicated, technological war is to go to the future for help. Philip St. John has a story coming up, entitled UNTO HIM THAT HATH, which knocks the obvious for a loop. Men with a time machine snatch a future plane back, all right; they even find a handbook for maintenance and repair, which should simplify things. And that future plane is a lulu—positively guaranteed to ruin them!

There'll be an unusually fine line-up of stories and features. And you'll find our first letter column, TAKE-OFF, where readers do just that—for anywhere! Watch for it at your newsstand, or be sure of getting it without fail by sending along that $2.00 for a year's subscription!

OFFICIAL RECORD

BY FLETCHER PRATT

Illustrated by SCHECTERSON

First Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by radio)

Intelligent Lord:

YOUR expedition is a success!

This report is sent from a point fifteen philads inside Kurada. There has been no opposition. The inhabitants are docile, mostly deformed, and without cultural activity, as predicted by the Scientific Board. They will make admirable laborers under our direction, while their deformities render them so repulsive that there will be little temptation for even the hottest-blooded youth to pollute our sacred Evadzonian blood with their debased strain. Moreover, their country has become amazingly fertile, and is in every respect suitable for colonization.

I will send further details of a general order tomorrow, when we expect to reach their ancient capital at Paralov. I now send the detailed narrative requested for study by the scientific board:

This morning, before penetrating the barrier, I ordered all hands into pressurized air-tight suits, and as an added precaution against contamination with the Twedorski mutation-virus, placed everyone inside the enclosed combat vehicles, personally inspecting the entire expedition to make certain the orders were carried out. My precautions occasioned some slight delay, as it was difficult to handle the bridging equipment under the conditions, and it was nearly noon before we reached the Kuradan side of the stream.

Here, of course, we had to pause while the scientific vehicle commanded by Dr. Govelsitz secured samples of the plant life and tested it for the virus. There was no opportunity to obtain samples of animal life immediately, except for some large insects, nearly four merkils in wingspread, which were occupied with the numerous and brilliant flowers of plants which at the same time bore large yellow fruit.

The report of Dr. Govelsitz was that in the hundred years since your gracious grandfather wisely released the Twedorski mutation-virus in Kurada, it had, as expected, bred out of both plants and the large insects, and they were established forms. Dr. Govelsitz' assistants are engaged in classifying the new forms. They believe the fruit may have economic value.

My own observation was that the forts which formerly occupied the Kuradan side of the stream were ruinous and the metal in them almost completely worn away with rust, which gave indeed a happy augury of the state to which the once-aggressive Kuradans must have declined under the influence of the mutations. At the bases of the cupolas in two of the forts burrowings about two handspans in diameter led downward at an angle through the concrete and metal. I conjecture that this means the development of a mutated burrowing animal of a quiet formidable character, possibly dangerous to human beings, even when protected by armored suits. I have orders for precautions, but no sign of the animals appeared. Dr. Govelsitz considers they may be nocturnal.

As soon as the doctor's report showed no immediate danger in proceeding, I dispatched combat vehicle XN-54 under Lieutenant Ghenjon to investigate the armored rocket-launchers at Sappuka which gave us so much trouble in the development of our legitimate ambitions a hundred years ago. He has not yet reported, but I expect him to rendezvous with the expedition at Paralov.

The expedition was now ordered to proceed toward Paralov, leaving behind combat vehicle XN-86 to maintain radio contact through the gap in the barrier. The roads are in very poor condition, heavily overgrown with vine-like growths several merkils in thickness. It is recommended that when a colonial expedition is sent, the vehicles be of tread type and include road-building equipment. For at least three philads all the buildings we perceived were in a state of utter decay, and we observed no signs of animal or human life except some small unidentified creatures that disappeared rapidly in the tangle of vines and yellow-fruited plants. Dr. Rab of the linguistic-anthropological unit desires to have placed before the Board his theory that the Evadzon border has become a place of superstitious terror to the modern Kuradans since the erection of the barrier.

I have no opinion on this, but I was forced to intervene officially in a dispute which arose between Dr. Govelsitz and Dr. Adelach of the biological unit. The former considers that the absence of avian life is due to the fact that the mutation virus introduced by Your Intelligence's grandfather caused the birds to develop into flightless forms. Dr. Adelach offered the theory that it was not the virus, but the atomic dusting dnring the last war. I suspect him of deviationism and have ordered that Govelsitz' view is official.

At three philads the road began to show more signs of use and several crudely-fenced fields were observed on the left. In one of them there was growing a crop of mutated grain with a large head and extremely hard shell; another held three animals, an old one and two young, the adult being about the size of a cow, but all with only one leg in front and four curling horns. Of course we collected them at once, and halted while they were examined. Dr. Govelsitz pronounces them free of any trace of the virus. They ap-

pear to breed rapidly and should form a useful addition to our food supply.

A third of a philad beyond and behind a hill which bore a large number of trees, we came upon our first modern Kuradans. There were four of them, working together at some hand-task on the porch of an old building whose glass walls had been much broken and repaired with some opaque material—two females and two children. They made no effort to escape, and my heart leaped up when I saw them, for I remembered our long struggle for adequate territorial resources with the obstinate Kuradans, and these were true mutation-types, who would never again be able to resist the will of the superior race. Their heads went almost directly back from the brows and the rear of the skull was over-developed; the breasts of the females were enormous. Dr. Rab, who of course went to talk to them at once, reports that they only have three fingers on each hand.

Of course, they were not very intelligent. He had difficulty both in understanding them and in making himself understood and was forced to use the simplest Kuradan words. Even the word "Evadzon" had no meaning for them. They offered him some of the yellow fruit, cut up into a liquid, addressing him by an appelation which he understood as "City Man," and saying that their male was busy gathering his quota of food for the "Little Gods." He could not make out what was meant by this phrase; it is doubtless a reference to some debased religious belief. He said they appeared very cheerful and glad to see him.

This was confirmed two philads farther on, when we reached what had evidently been a village a century ago, and still was, though the people now live in recently-built huts of their own, and have allowed the old buildings to decay. A number of them emerged from their hovels as the expedition entered the village, all females and children, and all exhibiting striking physical deformities. The flattened skull was general; in addition to the big-breasted type with a much over-developed right arm and hand and a left arm and hand equally under-developed.

I judged it prudent to have Dr. Govelsitz examine one of them for indications of the Twedorski virus and signalled his vehicle according-

ly. As soon as he and Rab appeared outside the vehicle, two or three of the females, uttering cries of pleasure, ran to their huts and returned with bowls of the liquid and yellow fruit. It was not difficult for Rab and Govelsitz to entice one of the females into the vehicle for testing and I am happy to inform Your Intelligence that the result of the test was negative, although the process occasioned some embarrassment to Govelsitz, the female having evidently mistaken the purpose for which he invited her into the vehicle.

I thereupon descended in person, accompanied by an interpreter, with the double purpose of learning what I could and affixing to a statue of some forgotten Kuradan hero in the public square a plaque taking possession of the place in the name of Your Intelligence. My interpreter experienced the same difficulties with the language as Rab, but he was able to make out that the creatures admired us greatly and were eager to present us with their preserved fruit. When I asked where their men were, they said at work, but they apparently have little concept of time, and could not give us the hour of their return.

While affixing the plate to the statue, I observed running down underneath it several more of the same type of burrows I had seen at the fortifications, and had the interpreter inquire what type of animal made them. The reply was "Little Gods," but he could obtain no satisfactory description. Rab describes this as an interesting return to totemism, indicating a barbaric culture level, and I agree. The clothes of the Kuradans are of poor quality and hand-woven; their buildings are the merest thatched huts. The bowls in which they offered us the preserved fruits are of rather anomolously fine quality and made of metal, and so was the small hand weaving apparatus one of the females carried. Perhaps there survives somewhere a certain degree of industrialization, a fact which we can determine when we reach Paralov. No sign of any form of cultural activity has been observed; the Kuradans merely stared uncomprehendingly at my plaque.

Apparently, writing is a lost art to them.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!

Shtenin, Major-General
In camp, 16th Moridd.

Second Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by rocket)

Intelligent Lord:

EVADZON must triumph! That we have encountered difficulties is only a proof that one cannot know in advance everything about the unknown; that we have overcome them is a proof of your supreme intelligence in selecting the personnel of the expedition which is opening vast new territories for the development of the Evadzonian race.

My head is at Your Intelligence's feet for not having reported earlier. It was not until today that I learned that yesterday's radio report probably did not reach Your Intelligence, and I hasten to make good the deficiency by repeating its substance in this document, which will be relayed through the gap in the barrier by combat vehicle XN-86.

To put the matter briefly, there are signs of a surreptitious opposition to our enlightening mission, but we have found the means of dominating it. The first sign came on the morning of the 17th, when we broke camp, nine philads inside the frontier. The camp was set up with only the normal night guards because of the lack of any evidence of hostility on the part of the inhabitants. In the morning, however there were found affixed to my own vehicle a series of metal plates bearing pictographic writing. One of these plates is enclosed for examination by the Scientific Board. Our own staff reports that it is of an alloy unknown to them, as is the means of impressing the writing upon it. They are investigating further.

The enclosed plate is the first of the series. As you will perceive, it shows a very good representation of two of our combat vehicles proceeding back across the bridge homeward, their crews wearing expressions of great happiness. The remainder of the series showed us entering a city which by its typical Kuradan architecture I took to be Paralov, wearing unhappy expressions, or doing wild, violent dances, with rolling eyes and disordered hair.

I interpreted this as a warning and the men of the scientific units agreed. Naturally, no attention was paid to it, but what attracted our attention was the quality of

the plates themselves and the deliniation. Before Your Intelligent grandfather released the Twedorski virus among them, the Kuradans were celebrated as an artistic, if tricky, people, but Dr. Rab assures me it would have been impossible for the debased peasants we have seen to have produced such works, either technologically or in deliniation. I was therefore forced to assume the existence of quite another mutant strain among them, and this was later strikingly confirmed.

The guards declared the night was quiet, though very dark, and they had seen no one approach the vehicles. I have given them second-level punishments (18 lashes and half an hour in the thumb press).

While the discussion of the plates was in progress, my attention was drawn to the peculiar behavior of Dr. Govelsitz. Someone suggested that we ought to find out whether the plates were really metal or something good to eat—in a jocular manner, of course—whereupon Govelsitz immediately seized on one and clamped his teeth on it, in a manner by no means jocular. A moment or two later he said to me that Dr. Adelach had told him he ought to confess that his theory for the absence of birds in Kurada was inferior to Adelach's own, and therefore he was abandoning his position in favor of that taken by Adelach. As I had already ordered that the Govelsitz theory (that the birds had mutated into flightless forms) was correct, this constituted a deviationist insult to the Supreme Intelligence. I at once ordered Govelsitz into arrest for psychological examination. It is very difficult to conduct while on active service, and he has not signed the confession prepared for him as yet, but we hope to hold the trial in another day or two.

Upon resuming the journey we encountered a procession of two-wheeled carts drawn by animals with round heads and long curling hair of about the size of a horse. The biological unit, after a cursory examination, pronounced them mutated sheep. Such animals might provide a valuable source of meat, and their hair can be turned over to the natives to be woven into clothing by their crude processes, thus relieving our synthetics trust of the necessity of providing such materials for the labor we will control.

The drivers of the carts were about evenly divided between the two types previously observed—the three-fingered species, and that with the disproportionate arms. It is not yet determined whether these can interbreed. The vehicles were loaded with metal articles; weaving tools like those previously reported, one whole load of the fine metal plates, and another of tools so remarkable that we confiscated samples, in spite of the protests of the drivers, who showed the greatest fear at our action. No opposition was threatened, however.

I will dispatch samples of these, together with collected flora and fauna, by vehicle as soon as possible. For the present, let me say that some of them are small machine tools, adapted to the cutting of highly refractory materials and others hand tools made for tiny hands, not over a merkil or two in span. All were of great fineness of workmanship, and argued not only a high degree of industrialization, but the existence of a third race of human mutants, dwarf-like in size. In the presence of these artifacts, I felt severely the misfortune of Govelsitz' conduct. None of the others seemed capable of throwing real illumination on the problem of the tools.

When questioned as to where they came from, the drivers answered quite readily that it was from the city; but when asked where they were bound, they only gave vague answers about the "Little Gods," with a number of words which, Rab says, have entered Kuradan since the barrier went up, and which are therefore unintelligible. I might have detached a vehicle to follow them, but judged it imprudent to isolate one, in view of the fact that the culture suggested by these tools is probably provided with dangerous means of attack and defense.

Rab says the mutant Kuradans possess a sense of hearing pitched several degrees above ours. When I blew my whistle for entrance into the cars and the resumption of the journey, they became greatly excited and began talking together all at once.

We reached the outskirts of Paralov late in the afternoon. Your Intelligence will appreciate that, although degenerate by our virile standards, the Kuradans possessed a certain artistic sense that enabled them to produce objects of great beauty. I recall the

exquisite Kuradan statuette which adorns Your Intelligence's desk. We have old pictures of Paralov, but it must be seen to be appreciated. Even ruinous, and with the vine-like trunks twisting across its broad avenues, it is a place of great beauty, with finely proportioned buildings. I would recommend that the city be reserved as a rest-camp, and the earliest colonization include entertainers and pleasure-girls. It will take very little labor to prepare some of the buildings for immediate occupancy, especially the fine one in which the Kuradans housed a collection of their paintings.

Immediately on reaching Paralov, our attention was caught by a plume of smoke against the sky, which rose steadily, not with the indication of something burning but of an industrial establishment. I ordered scouting formation in case there were defenses, and made an approach through the streets. The precaution proved unnecessary. When we reached the place, which was on the northern outskirts, it proved to be a long, low building of recent construction, not in the least like the traditional Kuradan architecture, which is tall, with angled buttresses, but domed over and close to the ground. As commander of the expedition, I did not hesitate to be the first to enter, accompanied by an armed guard and Dr. Rab.

The building proved to be the factory in which the tools and plates we had seen were being produced by workmen; so intent on their tasks that they hardly looked up to answer our interpreters' questions. In the first place, these workmen: they constitute a distinct third species of mutant modern Kuradan, being in all respects well-proportioned and even handsome, though rather small, and possessed of a very low degree of intelligence, even lower than that of the deformed peasant Kuradans. They were cooperative and willing to answer questions, but apparently did not understand much of what was said to them. This, however, may be merely clever concealment on their part, for reasons that I will describe presently.

Second: their work. They were operating automatic machines with power sources that came up through the floor and whose lines we have not traced. There was not too much apparent comprehension of the machines. Each worker had by his side a se-

ries of the metal plates with the steps of what he was doing pictured on it and kept glancing at it constantly. When one of the machines ceased operating, the worker at it merely stretched, stood up and walked away from it. From him we learned that these called themselves the "City Men" (the title given to us by the first Kuradans we encountered), and that they lived in Paralov.

While we were interviewing this individual Colonel Kaszuk entered to say that our radios had become inoperative. He had discovered it through trying to make contact with two of our cars which had apparently taken the wrong turn among the streets and had not joined the rest on schedule. At once recalling that I had not received any acknowledgment of my first report, I hurried out and confirmed that on all the common frequencies of all the radios in the cars, there was nothing but a high-pitched, persistent humming. As the instruments seemed in perfect order, this could only come from jamming.

I ordered experiment with very high and very low frequencies, in the meanwhile returning to the factory building, where the workers, with the exception of the one whose machine had broken down, continued to labor imperturbably. I demanded to know who was the head of the factory; he did not appear to understand. He was equally uncomprehending when I said that this radio jamming must cease at once, and it was clear that, although these Kuradans give every outward appearance of cooperation, we were dealing with the type of opposition known as underground.

There is an established procedure for dealing with this, which I think the modern Kuradans have become too much mutated and too far out of contact with civilization to remember. I immediately took an armed detail into the factory, plucked every third man from his place, and taking them outside, informed them that unless the jamming ceased, they would be executed. At about this time, the work in the factory ceased, and the workers came trooping out. I repeated the admonition, and to reinforce it, gave one of them the thumbpress. He screamed in a satisfactory manner and the others seemed disturbed, but without positive result.

For the night, I retired the force to a hill beyond the fac-

tory and posted war-standard guards. We were undisturbed, and in the morning, the remaining workers returned to the factory as though nothing had happened. Your Intelligence will perhaps not approve my forebearance, but feeling it always better to obtain the willing cooperation of subject peoples, I had the interpreters warn these "City Men" repeatedly before proceeding to measures. As the radios remained inoperative, I took one of the prisoners into the factory and gave him the thumb-press at full intensity. He died after only two hours and seventeen minutes, which indicates a low order of physical resistance among these people, but the rest still affected not to understand what we were asking them.

I executed two more of the prisoners in the course of the afternoon, and have informed the rest that the remainder will be executed tomorrow unless the radio jamming ceases. The examiners report that Govelsitz is quite irrational today, throwing himself about violently and demanding some of the yellow fruit which grows in this country. I am still without word from Ghenjon, and in order that this report shall reach Your Intelligence at once, am forwarding it by rocket to vehicle XN-86 to be passed through the gap in the barrier.

Dr. Rab is inclined to the hypothesis that there is a fourth species of mutated Kuradan man, very small, and capable of using the tools we saw. I have issued no order against this theory, but I regard it as less tenable than the one that these "City Men" are themselves responsible for the radio business. Very well; I intend to bring them to terms at the beginning of what will prove a happy relationship with Evadzon.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!

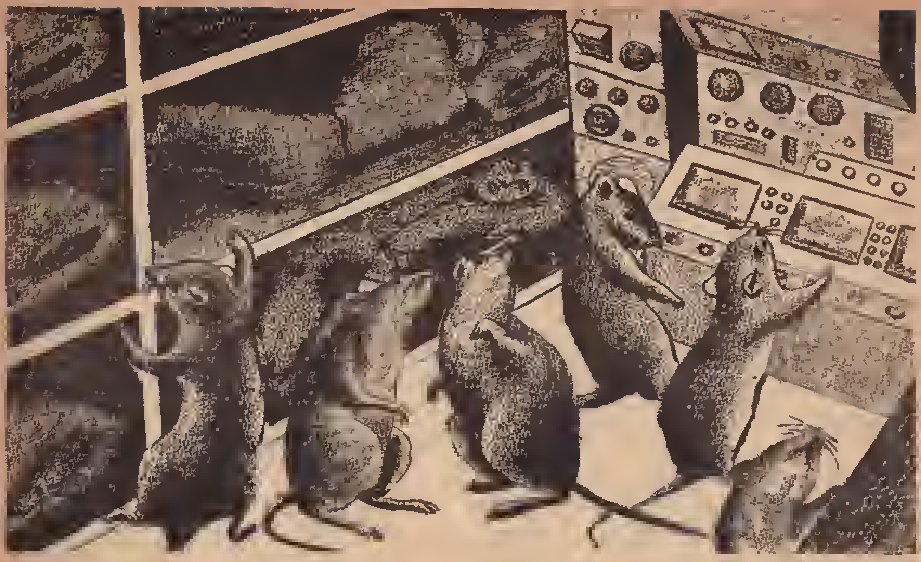
Shtenin, Major-General
At Paralov, 18th Moridd.

Third Report of the First Kurada Expedition (by radio)

Intelligent Lord:

THE City Men of Kurada have surrendered! Evadzon must triumph!

This morning, as we approached the factory with a new group of prisoners, preparing to execute several of them at once to make our purpose perfectly clear, we were met by a large number of



women of their species. They were carrying bowls of the preserved yellow fruit, which seems to have an honorific significance among them, and they gestured entieingly. Through Rab, who is acquiring considerable facility in their language, I explained that while we cherished the friendliest feelings toward them, the jamming of our radios must cease, or they would have to take the consequences. This the women seemed to understand.

The one who approached me replied that to be friends, we must accept their fruit, and showed me one of the metal plates with an illustration of a man and woman eating together from one of the bowls. I accordingly took a piece of it—it is not at all bad, pulpy and with a flavor like that of spiced pears, though if I am any judge, alcoholic—and permitted the other members of the expedition to accept fruit from the bowls being offered to them. The women clapped their hands in delight, and one of them ran into the building, while the one who had accosted me flung her arms around my neck and would not be satisfied until we had emptied the bowl together.

A few moments later Colonel Kaszuk came running

from the camp to say that the radio interference had ceased and he was in communication with XN-86, though not as yet with Ghenjon's XN-54. Naturally, we were delighted, and I ordered the prisoners released at once, except three whom we retained as hostages against further troubles.

But it seems there will be no further troubles. As soon as the prisoners were released, the Kuradan woman with me also ran back into the factory building, uttering the single word "Wait." Presently she returned with an animal on her shoulder which looked like a white rat, at least two handspans long, but with an enormous head.

"It is one of the Little Gods," she said. "They are very good, and tell us everything."

The creature was not at all repulsive and evidently very intelligent. It placed its head close to her ear and made a series of high-pitched sounds, at which she laughed, and then burst into a flow of words, from which Rab finally extracted the statement that the entire personnel of the expedition was invited to spend the day in a banquet with the women while the men were at work. This was so pleasant a termination to our victory that I acceeded at once, and the announcement to the crews was received with cheers.

They are saucy wenches with long, dark hair, well-formed even as we understand the term in Evadzon. I understand that as the mutation has made them into a quite separate species, there can be no question of interbreeding, and I therefore anticipate a pleasant day. The one with me is named Clypteia.

I regret to say that Dr. Govelsitz died at dawn. He was violently insane.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!

Shtenin, Major-General
At Paralov, 19th Moridd, morning.

Statement of Gavil Brobon, Communication Mechanic

I WAS communication mechanic of the command vehicle XP-22 during the First Kurada Expedition. I have read the reports of General Shtenin. As far as my observation goes, it is accurate.

I have to add only that, being questioned on the point, I remember that Dr. Govelsitz ate a quantity of the pre-

served fruit known as dream-pears before examining the Kuradan woman for traces of the Twedorski mutation-virus.

I was on duty in the radio compartment of the command vehicle on the 19th Moridd at Paralov, and therefore did not accompany the remainder of the crews to the banquet. I would say that they were intoxicated when they returned in the evening, particularly General Shtenin. I say it because his movements were uncertain and his voice thick. He set no guards for the night.

As I had not been relieved, I remained on duty, and received the acknowledgment of General Shtenin's report, transmitted through XN-86. At twilight the radio again became inoperative in the same manner as before. I did not like to rouse the General under the circumstances, so I set the radio on a screamer which would rouse me in case it came on again and went to sleep.

I was roused just before midnight by sounds in the vehicle. When I looked out of the compartment I saw several of the large white rats known as "Little Gods" in the vehicle. They were walking on their hind legs and examining all the equipment, talking to each other in high-pitched voices. The lights were not on, but some of them carried small, dim flashlights, by the illumination of which they took down and replaced very quickly one of the rocket-projectors. One of them entered General Shtenin's compartment with a bundle of the metal plates.

In the morning, I reported the failure of the radio to Colonel Kaszuk. He said it did not matter. I then reported it to the General. He said he had been informed that it was better not to use the radio for the time being. At the time he had two of the metal plates in his hand. I did not look at them closely, but I believe they pictured the expedition returning. He sent out a detail to procure more of the preserved dream-pears, and they all ate some. I did not have any myself.

After this, the General gave orders for the return journey. None of the officers protested. Outside Paralov, we met vehicle XN-54, which joined our movement. We proceeded at high speed, arriving at the bridge after dark. XN-86 was on duty there. As soon as we arrived Commander Videlacht got out of his vehicle and came over to

ours. General Shtenin got out to meet him.

Commander Videlacht then asked what he was doing there and why he had not obeyed the order to set up an outpost at Paralov. The General said he had received no such orders, and even if he had it was necessary to return at once. Commander Videlacht went to his vehicle to get the order file, and I think it was at this time that Lieutenant Ghenjon came over. One of the rats was sitting on his shoulder. When Commander Videlacht came back he made some remark about the rat, I don't know what, and I thought he was going to hit it, and Lieutenant Ghenjon shot him. General Shtenin said it was just what he should have done.

I believe in the Supreme Intelligence of Toxernn III.

Report of the Scientific Board of Examination in the Case of the Late Bosip Shtenin

Intelligent Lord:

WE REGRET exceedingly not having secured the confession of the traitor Shtenin before his death. Unfortunately, he was already so irrational when our examination began that neither the thumb-press nor the lights had any effect upon him. As he kept screaming for preserved dream-pears, we immediately administered some to the other surviving prisoners. Their jerkings ceased at once and they became, to all appearances, normal. But we noted that they were left with a high degree of suggestibility, and would at once perform the most absurd acts when ordered. By lowering the dosage, this suggestibility was also lowered.

Chemical analysis of the preserved fruit shows that it contains a narcotic alkaloid whose formula we have not yet determined. It is evidently habit-forming, and so violent in its effects that cutting off the supply produces the death of the subject, as we have confirmed in several cases. On the other hand, a small daily dosage appears to leave the subject without physical damage.

Samples of the fresh fruit have also been analyzed. They do not contain the alkaloid, which is thus evidently produced during the process of preservation. On this we have no data at present.

The other and more serious question arising from the attached documents concerns the rats known as "Little

Gods." We consider it evident that under the influence of the Twedorski mutation-virus the rats of Kurada have mutated into a tool-using, social form, of an intelligence nearly as high as the human, and certainly higher than the mutated humans of Kurada. Even independent of the use of the dream-pears, they seem to possess considerable powers of suggestion, or psychic control over humans, and when these powers are exercised upon humans under the influence of the drug, they become absolutely irresistible, as is evident from the traitor Shtenin's decision to return from Paralov in the face of orders.

The drug would be useful in some of the processes of government, and the rats represent a potential danger. We therefore recommend a second expedition to Kurada to obtain some of the drug and to explore methods of destroying the rats as a prelude to occupation. Samples of the live rats or even of dead ones for analysis would be peculiarly useful.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
27th Moridd.

Report from Madsill, Chief of Secret Police

NO TRACE of the traitor Ghenjon or of the large white rats he brought from Kurada in his vehicle has yet been found. However, I have important information which I believe will lead to the capture of both within a few days.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!
13th Avluna.

First Report of the Second Kurada Expedition (by rocket)

Intelligent Lord:

CONFORMABLE to your orders, the expedition avoided the main highroad to Paralov, where the rats and the human Kuradans would be forewarned, and took a westerly direction. Tonight finds us encamped at the village marked as Tatalo on the old maps, twenty philads inside Kurada. The inhabitants have everywhere received us well, offering us bowls of the dream-pears, which were placed under seal.

As instructed, I have collected two specimens, one of the disproportionately armed species and one of the three-fingered type. They made little objection to accompany-

ing us. The interpreting staff assures me that they will be cooperative in communicating with one of the Little Gods when we have secured one. The Kuradans say they can understand what these rats say.

As also instructed, I laid bare one of the burrows under the border forts; extremely hard work, for the material was highly refractory. At a distance of twenty hand-spans down, it expanded into a series of chambers, some of which had permanent metal furniture fixed to the wall, but the place was not occupied, and from the debris scattered around, appeared to be deserted. There was an outlet and a very curious aerial for a radio, but no instrument.

Our own radios are inoperative. We have seen no other signs of the Little Gods.

Long live Toxernn III, Supreme Intelligence of Evadzon!

Huntervann, Major-General
14th Avluna

Report from Communications Center, 3rd Military District

NO reports received from General Huntervann for two days.
16th Avluna.

Report from Communications Center, 3rd Military District

SECOND Kuradan Expedition has just crossed bridge and entered fortified area.
17th Avluna, noon.

Second Report of the Second Kurada Expedition

Intelligent Lord:

YOUR Intelligence has been grievously misinformed.

By conversation with the rats known as "Little Gods" through the Kuradans who can understand their speech, I have learned that they only desire to live in friendly symbiosis with us. I have brought a number of them with me to convince Your Intelligence and the Scientific Board of this. The "Little Gods" are not only friendly, but have a profound knowledge of many technical subjects and will gladly direct us.

As for the fruit known as dream-pears it is actually beneficial in all respects.

I have fortunately secured a generous supply of it.

Long live Toxernn III.

Huntervann, Major-General
17th Avluna, afternoon, 3rd Military District.

Message to Lieut.-General Chorr, Commanding 3rd Military District

ARREST General Huntervann and his entire staff at once. Exterminate all white rats.

Toxernn

Message to Intelligence Center

Intelligent Lord:

YOUR Intelligence has been misinformed.

General Huntervann is a loyal and intelligent citizen. His action in bringing the "Little Gods" here will result in untold benefits to all Evadzon. They only desire to live in friendly symbiosis with us, and to give us the benefit of their science. I am dispatching several to the other military districts by plane and combat vehicle with Kuradan interpreters.

Your approval is expected.

I am also sending a supply of dream-pears which, I find, conduce to a better understanding of the "Little Gods."

Chorr, Lieutenant-General
18th Avluna.

Message to General Lebartsen, Commander of the Forces

MOBILIZE air force at once. Bomb 3rd Military District with atomics. Destroy all planes and combat vehicles from that point on sight and exterminate any white rats observed.

Toxernn
18th Avluna.

Message to Intelligence Center

YOUR Intelligence must have met with some accident, or be ill-advised.

Your extraordinary message calling for the bombing of the 3rd Military District and the killing of the "Little Gods" reached me three hours after the arrival of a deputation from General Chorr, accompanied by several of the "Little Gods" themselves. I had a most enjoyable communication with them. They only wish to live in Evadzon, as they do in Kurada, in friendly relationship with us, and to give us the benefit of their science.

They desire me to set a guard around your palace until Your Intelligence recovers from your indisposition, and I am doing so.

I trust that with their assistance, your recovery will soon be assured.

Lebartsen, General

THE REVISITOR

BY THEODORE L. THOMAS

The Genter Test proved that Marl could da anything—and it wos never wrong. But there are some things no machine can discoverl

Illustrated by GARI

THE last agent was receiving his assignment; the others had already left. Some had walked out on varying numbers of legs, some had slithered out, and still others had had to be carried. Life took strange forms on the several planets throughout the galaxy and the agents had to conform.

The last agent was preparing to leave. The Mesos was giving his final instructions.

"It might be that this race merits extinction, particularly if your last visit is any criterion; we almost didn't get you out. However, externally at least, conditions seem to have changed, so maybe we won't have to wipe them

out. It shouldn't take long to tell. Don't spend a lot of time there, there's a lot of other work to do."

The agent nodded and said, "I'll arrive differently. I'll mingle with the people so that they don't know who I am."

"Good," said the Mesos.

"Anything else?" asked the agent.

The Mesos shook his head.

The agent turned and headed for the opening that led out of the great domed chamber. He almost reached it when the Mesos called after him.

"Oh, Té."

The agent stopped and listened.

"Don't make such a big thing out of it this time."

The agent smiled and disappeared through the opening.

BUSINESS had been slow for Romero all morning, but he liked it that way. It was much nicer to tip back in his chair in the pleasant Texas sun than it was to haul passengers around the country side in his ancient taxicab.

The first time he knew anyone was near him was when he heard a voice ask, "Can you take me to the Rugmon Laboratories?"

Romero pulled out of his doze and looked up at the speaker. He saw a tall well-built man with sparse brown hair. Romero hesitated before answering. He didn't like to undertake the twenty-mile round trip when lunch was only an hour away. He might not get back in time. His old '94 Ford wasn't as peppy as she used to be. But then he thought of his wife and the row that would start if he turned down even such a short jaunt as this. He sighed and heaved himself out of the chair. He faced the stranger full and started to quote him his number one sucker price. But he cut himself short.

The stranger had the build and face of a very young man, 20 to 25 or so. But his build and face lied; his eyes told the true story, but Romero couldn't believe it. His eyes were blacker than Romero's own. Not just a surface blackness but a blackness that seemed never to end, deep, deeper than the man himself. There were no noticeable pupils, but half-inch black openings that pointed at Romero from all eternity. So Romero quickly changed his price to the regular fare and the stranger agreed.

A half-hour later as the cab entered the main grounds of

the vast Rugmon Laboratories Romero asked his passenger where he wanted to go.

"The Genter Test building, please."

"Oho," thought Romero. "Another candidate." He spoke aloud. "Do you want me to wait for you, sir?"

"No. That won't be necessary."

Romero felt annoyed. This guy was too sure of himself. Only one out of every half a million passed the Test yet this man wasn't even considering the possibility of his failing it. But then Romero remembered those eyes and his annoyance disappeared. Well, maybe so.

He pulled up in front of a large plain building with an inscription over the door that read—GENTER TEST.

"Here you are, sir," he said.

The stranger got out and paid him. Romero wished him good luck and drove off feeling somehow a little relieved.

INSIDE the building the tall stranger stopped in front of the main desk and spoke to the clerk.

"I'd like to take the Test."

"Certainly, sir," was the reply. "May I have your name and address?"

A moment's hesitation, then—"Dron Marl, Beirut."

The clerk wrote it down and asked, "This isn't a Political Test, is it?"

Marl shook his head.

"No," went on the clerk. "It'll be another month before the politicians begin coming in. We can take you right now." He pushed a button.

A guide came through a sliding door. The clerk gave him Marl's name, told him he was here for the Lab Test, and waved them on.

The Test Room wasn't far off. The guide turned Marl over to the attendants and disappeared. Marl looked around.

It was an impressive sight. The room measured about 50 by 50 feet. All four walls were banked with recording instruments—little circles of paper on which the now-dormant needles traveled. The recorders were grouped into sets and each set had a master recorder. The pattern repeated itself around the entire room except for a part of one wall. That part contained the instruments that summarized the entire Test.

But the most striking feature was the Test Chair itself. It sat in the center of the room facing the summarizing instruments. It looked like a

seat carved out of a solid block of aluminum. The helmet hung suspended from large cables; the jacket lay over one massive arm. It looked like the sort of thing that would be hard to get out of once you got in.

One of the attendants broke up Marl's survey.

"Please remove your coat, sir."

Marl did so and the attendant hung it up on the back of the entering door.

The attendant spoke again. "There will be no sensation beyond a slight itching at the surface of the skin. The Test takes about one second, so we will know the result even before we get the equipment off you. All set?"

Marl nodded.

Four assistants led him to the Test Chair and helped him into the sleeveless metal jacket. A band passed between his legs and fastened in front. When the jacket was in place he sat down. The helmet was lowered and strapped around his head leaving only his nose and mouth exposed. Every organ in his body was encased in the metal mesh.

The four assistants stepped back. The attendant pressed a button. Every needle in the room came alive. The four assistants moved forward to release Marl. The attendant glanced at the summarizing instruments, glanced and then took a long look. His eyes widened. He reached down and picked up a small phone.

"The Director, please. Priority."

As he waited he watched Marl's head emerge from the helmet. He was about to speak to Marl when the Director came on.

"This is the Test Room," the attendant said. "Can you come right over? We've just tested a Number One."

THE Genter Test had been in use for some eighteen years. It had all started in the fertile brain of William Genter. Genter had been a bright young physicist more interested in doodling with magnetic fields than in earning a living. In 1971 he stumbled on the basic concept that a magnetic field was perceptibly changed by the minute electrical disturbances that took place during a chemical reaction. Just that, and nothing more.

Three years later Genter and a few eminent physicists talked to the Secretary of Science about all the ramifications of the discovery. They pointed out that it might be possible to explore every

single chemical reaction that went on in the human body—that knowing how a man's cells were functioning might in turn give a perfect picture of a man's capabilities. In short, here was a possible means of assessing a man's worth to an extent never before dreamed of. But it would take money, a huge amount of money.

The Secretary was interested enough to call in the heads of several committees. And the whole project died right there. The committees just couldn't see the expenditure of several billions of dollars for a gadget that could tell a man he shouldn't have been born. No, sir. It wasn't worth it.

That's where Hank Rugmon stepped in. Rugmon had started out as a driller's assistant in the oil fields. By the time he was fifty-eight he had built up such a fortune that nobody was sure how much he had. Conservative estimators put his weekly take at about a million and a half dollars; the liberal estimates were ridiculous.

Anyhow Rugmon agreed to back Genter and his associates to the hilt. It was never clear whether Rugmon did it because he had the best interest of science at heart or because he wanted financially to thumb his nose at the United States Government. Rugmon was shrewd. He was probably the best financier the country had ever seen. It took a whole staff of accountants to keep up with the intricate maneuvers he was forever engaged in. He had turned down every top-flight job the government had to offer. He seemed to be forever seeking new fields to conquer. Yet he wasn't a selfish man, nor was he power-happy. He merely liked to square off against any and all difficulties.

So the Rugmon Corporation bought a few hundred square miles of land just north of Brownfield, Texas, and the project got under way.

Research fellowships were farmed out all over the world. Genter set up a huge laboratory to iron out some of the remaining design problems. More and more experts flocked to his staff. The scientific cream of the country became intrigued with the idea. Most of them realized that if Genter's discovery could be put to practical use it would be the greatest discovery since the invention of movable type. The staff of scientists grew larger as the research needs increased. It finally got

to the point where industry began to complain. Many of the good men were leaving to join Genter.

But by now the eyes of the whole world were focused on the project. A steady outpouring of valuable information in all branches of science had impressed even the scoffers. And in 1981 when Rugmon's vast still ran dry the government took over.

Everybody was behind it now. Genter's hazy idea had developed into a roomful of practical blueprints. Small calculators had been built to test out certain phases of human behavior. One of them up in Boston was now giving accurate measurements of Pride. In Washington, D. C., it was Music. And Nevada took care of Mathematics. These and many other test units sufficed to show that it could be done.

MUCH of the work was empirical. But much of it was the result of scientific analysis. It turned out that the supposedly fictitious lines of magnetic flux in a magnetic field were not fictitious after all; the hypothetical tiny tubes were really there. When a magnetic field was passed through a man's body each line of flux would pass through only a single molecule—if it passed through any at all. It depended on the probability laws. The measurement of changes in the flux line gave the measurement of the chemical reactions in a man's body. And since a man is no more than his hormonal and enzymatic reactions allow him to be, the remainder of the problem was a question of interpretation.

But what interpretation. It took twenty-eight electronic calculators to do the job and each calculator was larger than any that had ever been built. Some of the time the scientists weren't certain of what they were doing; they were often in over their heads. But each completed calculator made the next one easier. Each calculator helped solve the problems still ahead. Things sort of snowballed. Some of the workers were acutely uncomfortable at blindly following what the machines dictated. But they went on.

Rugmon was left in charge as administrator since he was the only man who could handle it. He had a marvelous facility for ironing out the myriad of obstacles that blocked their way. Sometimes he greased the path. Other times he blasted. He

always seemed to know the best technique to use. And he was happier as a thirty-thousand-a-year administrator than he had ever been as a wealthy industrialist.

In fact, the project affected all the workers that way. From the lab assistants on up to Genter there was a kind of feeling about the work that had never existed before. There was a deep satisfaction, an intense contentment, a foreboding of good.

Toward the end the scale of effort had become immense. It went way beyond the level that the United States had attained when it developed the atom bomb in one of the wars in the old days. Practically every scientist in the country was working on it in one way or another. The knowledge gained from it was so great that even the depleted industrial laboratories came out ahead. Nothing was kept secret. All information was passed out to whoever wanted it.

And finally in 1990 came the great day when the Test was ready for use. There was no need for preliminary testing; that had been done during construction. Once the last connections were made the entire Test was in complete and perfect working order. There was nothing to do but wait for the stampede of people to take advantage of it. But a startling situation appeared.

It turned out that everybody was perfectly delighted to have everybody else take the Test. But when it came to having his own character spread out on paper each man wanted no part of it. All of Genter's co-workers took it. So did a few cranks and a few sincere people from various parts of the world. But nothing significant, nothing to make the vast outlay worth while.

Genter broke the embarrassed silence with a brilliant suggestion: Why not use the Test to select a staff of the finest scientists to work in a government-owned laboratory? Have the best men in every field brought together under one roof. Let them work there, solving if they could any problems that were tossed to them. Let them do original work too. In short, use them as a fountain of knowledge for the good of the whole nation.

THE idea had so much merit that it was put into operation after the usual haggling. There was opposition but nothing that couldn't be over-

come. Standards were set up and in 1991 the Rugmon Laboratories became a national institution.

That same year brought the second great suggestion. It all started when Congressman Hansey was discovered siphoning public funds into enterprises that did no one any good except Congressman Hansey. Right after the trial a stouthearted Senator moved to pass a law requiring all holders of public office to take the Test. That started it. The country split into factions. Many people were still suspicious of the Test. Others couldn't make up their minds. Most of the office holders wanted no part of it.

Genter and Rugmon pointed out that the standards of the Test could be set wherever desired. They recommended that the Test be used merely to eliminate the incapable, the truly selfish, and the potentially criminal. The people softened. Then Rugmon, shrewd old Rugmon, added his clincher. Let the present incumbents go untested but make it mandatory for all new office seekers to take the Test. And so it was enacted.

The very next election showed the results. Several of the hopefuls sneaked off and took the Test. When they saw they had passed it they based their whole campaign on it. It worked. Untested politicians were promptly defeated. The Congress took on a new air.

Six years later there wasn't an untested man left. The entire legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government were made up of well-balanced men eager to do the best job they could.

Inevitably the standards of the Political Test were set higher and higher. Many politicians dropped out and went back to selling shirts. A reign of prosperity set in. A twenty-five-hour week was instituted. Wise planning evened out many inequities without curbing the freedom and initiative of the individual.

The time came when the people recognized the danger of setting the political standards too high. A committee made a careful study of the situation. They recommended standards high enough to insure excellent government yet low enough so as not to exclude more than three-quarters of the people. The proposal was submitted in the form of an Amendment to the Constitution. The Congress adopted it, all fifty states ratified it, and it became part of

the supreme law of the land.

And the United States wasn't alone. Public opinion forced foreign officials to take the Test too. The United Nations representatives were among the first and did surprisingly well. More and more candidates for office in other countries showed up with a successful Test behind them. Many of the results were unexpected. The head of one royal family turned out to be reasonably competent after all. Another small country wasn't able to produce a single man with integrity enough to govern it. It reluctantly accepted a governor appointed by the United Nations.

And all the time the Rugmon Laboratories increased in importance. By 2008 the laboratory proper consisted of some 2,100 men and women, each of them a brilliant specialist in one or more fields. In addition, there were many thousands of assistants in every conceivable occupation and trade. Welders, machinists, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, every trade was represented by the finest in the business. An entire city grew up on the site, a city geared to the needs and demands of the Laboratories. And it was unquestionably the happiest city on earth. The people in it all loved their work; they wouldn't have been happy doing anything else.

BUT great changes took place throughout the land. The great industrial laboratories throughout the country began to dry up. So did the patent system, except for the host of tricky and useful gadgets that help make life easier. These were still patented. The Rugmon Laboratories was so efficient that it was no longer worth while for any company to undertake a research program. It was easier just to ask the Rugmon workers for a solution to all problems. And when the answer came out it became public property; it belonged to all the world. Original research would have stagnated had it not been for the initiative of the Rugmon personnel themselves. In addition to answering industrial problems and loaning out their engineers when needed, they kept up a ceaseless flow of brand-new unheard-of discoveries. Polio, tuberculosis, and other diseases vanished from the earth. Cancer was brought under control although it could never be prevented. A satellite was started on an endless orbit around the

earth. A rocket was successfully crashed on the moon.

New fertilizers and farming methods brought food production way up. The acceptance of birth control measures was sufficiently widespread to seem to make a liar out of Malthus; but it was too soon really to tell.

Despite all this the people hadn't changed basically. There was still crime. There was still too many accidents. A Hollywood starlet made the headlines because she had been married twenty-eight months now and hadn't had a divorce yet. Children still conversed in their customary screams. People griped about the way things were going.

But behind it all was a hardly-felt feeling of satisfaction. Things were good. The government could be trusted, and so could science. Given that, the people could take care of the rest; they needed nothing more. And nowadays when you walked into a bar for a glass of beer you found pretzels and bagels in the same bowl.

Experience had shown that the Laboratories could best be staffed by dividing all personnel into sixteen groups. The Number Ones were the original thinkers, men like Newton and Einstein or as close as could be found. The Number Sixteens were the engineers, the practitioners. In between were all grades and distinctions. But they all had one thing in common. They had few blind spots. The Test saw to that. Many a brilliant man failed because of anchoritic tendencies. Some few got through even though the Test showed that they preferred to work alone, that they didn't much care about other people. But in those cases the Test also showed that the men knew it, and that they had a saving sense of humor. In fact, humor ranked high among the qualifications necessary to pass either the Political Test or the Lab Test. Humor and imagination go hand in hand, and a man without imagination is somewhat less than a man should be.

The Test measured a candidate's learning and education as well as his native ability. Occasionally a man who flunked the Test would come back years later and pass it. In fact, most people who took it the second time passed it; that was because the first Test showed that experience was all that they needed; potentialities could be charted as easily as realities. It was thought better that these

people gain their experience outside of the Laboratories.

The Test would have been criticized into oblivion had it not been for the far-seeing wisdom of Rugmon and Genter. From the very beginning those two had insisted that the Test never be forced on anyone. And more than that they insisted that all results be kept secret. Each candidate gave his name, address, and thumb print. He was told the results and the card was filed away where no one could get it. If the candidate wanted to tell people the results, that was his business. At the same time there was no possibility of lying about passing the Test. Anybody could phone the Laboratories free of charge and check up on someone else. The automatic operator responded with one of two answers: "Passed," or "Not listed." Most of the time though the check-up was done through the mail with a thumb print enclosed. For people with no thumbs other identifying means were used. The attendants that conducted the Test were all men who had themselves been Tested. Their integrity was of the highest. There was no possibility for fraud or deception anywhere.

By 2008 the Test was almost universally accepted as part of civilized life. There was no shame in failing it; too many good men couldn't come close to passing the Lab Test and couldn't quite make the Political Test. It worked out statistically that a Number One came along only once every eighteen years. Whenever one did, the whole world celebrated. That's why the attendant's mouth fell open when he read the master instruments giving the results of Marl's Test. That's why he fell over himself in eagerness to call the Director. That's why he said, "This is the Test Room. Can you come right over? We've just tested a Number One."

THE Director was there in six minutes flat. He swept into the room and right over to Marl to shake his hand.

"Welcome," he said. "This is wonderful. What is your name? Marl? Well, Doctor Marl, your arrival is the best thing we've had in a long time. Where have you been hiding?"

Marl smiled. "Not hiding, just studying. I had a lot to work out in my own mind before I came."

"I understand," said the Director. Then: "Would you

like to look over the results of your Test?"

"Very much," replied Marl.

Side by side the two of them began to work their way around the panelboards that lined the room. The Director cxplained things as they went. But before they'd covered half of one wall the Director was all but speechless. This was unbelievable. Every minute breakdown of knowledge, learning, and character stood higher than the Director had ever seen. Not perfect—there could be no such thing. Just awfully high.

The Director translated Marl's capabilities into direct comparisons.

"A better mathematician than Sternwood. Better chemist than Cohen. Better physicist than Stuml. Better . . ."

On and on it went. Marl was even a better administrator than Director Lancing himself. In fact, Marl was far better at everything than any man had ever been.

Lancing was puzzled. He looked at Marl strangely.

"You will have to choose the work you want to do," he said. "There's no way for me to know what's best." He was silent a moment. Then he went on: "Do you know what you want to do?"

"Yes," said Marl. "I have something I'd like to try. I have a theory that can be tested within a short time, a few weeks, I think. If you can give me—oh—two assistants, biochemists, I should soon be able to test it. After that we can talk about what to do next."

"Good," said Lancing. "And now come. I'll introduce you to some of the others."

MARL'S two assistants were Tom and Ginny Martin, the only married couple in the Laboratories. Both of them were skilled biochemists famed for their work in nucleoproteins. In the old days it would have been considered suicidal to put man and wife together on the same job. But the Martins complemented each other. They worked better together than either could have worked with anyone else. They were very young to be Rugmon workers. Tom was thirty-three; Ginny a year younger. Both were Number Twelves.

They greeted Marl cordially and showed him around the laboratory where they were to work. When Marl felt he knew his way around they all sat down at a desk and Marl began to outline his program.

"We are going to synthe-

size a set of genes from which we will build chromosomes. With the chromosomes and proteinacious matter I think we can concoct a fertilized egg. The egg can be grown in . . . What's the matter?"

The silence was thick and heavy. The Martins stared at him, bewildered. Marl spoke first.

"I guess I went too fast. I'm sorry. You see I have already worked out all the details for the production of this fertilized egg. I know exactly how I think it should go. It's now merely a question of putting it into practice."

Tom explained their bewilderment.

"You caught us flatfooted. As far as we know only two genes have ever been identified. And synthesis of any of them is fifty years away. Yet here you talk about synthesizing an entire cell—a fertilized cell at that."

Ginny took it up.

"We've known that eventually life could probably be started in a test tube. But we always thought it was centuries away. Now we find it's going to happen in our own lifetime."

Marl smiled and said, "You're putting a lot of confidence in my theory. It might not work."

Ginny didn't smile back. "I know it will," she said.

Marl produced a loose-leaf notebook crammed with equations and notations. He roughed out a good many of the procedures to be followed explaining enough so that the two scientists could grasp what was called for. Many pages in the notebook were covered with beautiful sketches of the necessary equipment. As soon as Tom clearly understood the apparatus he took charge of getting it made. He sent for the Chief Glassblower to explain what was needed in glass. Electricians and mechanics were briefed on the auxiliary equipment. Tiny pumps and motors had to be designed. Metallurgists were brought in to decide what alloys could be used where. Countless copies of Marl's sketches were distributed so that all the teams could work closely together.

Ginny took care of the chemical end. Chemists were assigned to prepare the numerous compounds and solutions. Other chemists carried out test reactions to establish optimum conditions. Physical chemists worked out specifications to control some of the lesser-known reactions. Specialists in carbohydrates and

fats joined with the others in rounding out the picture. And every word that was said was recorded by the Autorecs and classified in the Central Library where each technician and scientist could get at it. The Labs worked overtime.

Right about this time Ginny turned up pregnant. There were many congratulations and much back slapping; everybody knew that they'd been trying for some time, even though the best medical opinions had said it was hopeless. The doctors now examined her, pronounced her perfect, put her on a diet, and sent her back to work. It did not slow her down much. She just made sure she never got overly tired.

THE next two weeks were hectic. Marl and the Martins hardly ever left the Labs. They ordered their food sent in. They slept in the nearby Sleep Rooms. They took lots of hot showers, drank lots of hot coffee.

Ginny always made the coffee despite the fact that there was plenty to be had from the Food Rooms. Tom explained that Ginny's coffee had a bite to it, a bitterness, a sort of partly-burned flavor that couldn't be duplicated. "I've drunk it so long now," he said, "that I can't stand decent stuff."

Ginny glowered at him, and was about to speak when a familiar hissing noise came from the next room where the percolator was. Ginny leaped up and flew in.

"She's got a nice system there," said Tom. "She always knows when it starts to percolate—she waits 'til she hears it boil over . . . Let's see, where were we?"

And the work went on.

The Martins found that they could master the complex equations without undue difficulty. The equations themselves weren't so bad; it was the assumptions on which they were based that were hard to swallow. Marl seemed to know the exact formula for many thousands of genes. He also had processes for synthesizing six different kinds of proteinacious jelly. With these tools alone he was proposing to synthesize life.

As he explained it though it seemed to make sense. "It's mostly a matter of setting up the right conditions. We will select the genes that will give us the animal we want. By bringing these genes together in the proper order we will get our chromosomes. The chromosomes can be implanted in a variable protein to

form the nucleolus and nucleus. The reticulum is next. Then the whole nucleus will be placed inside the cytoplasmic matter and we are all done. From there on it's just a matter of nurturing it properly. See?"

"No," said Tom. "But as long as YOU do it's all right, I guess." He thought for a moment, then asked, "What about differentiation?"

"That takes care of itself," said Marl. "Everything is controlled by the proper selection of genes at the start. As cell division proceeds the genes, as you know, act as templates for the synthesis of duplicate genes. At certain points some genes become more active than others, due to their physical shape. It's a process that's similar to steric hindrance. Differentiation is nothing more than a change in the relative activity of the genes."

"Oh," said Tom. He sat there thinking about the years of unsuccessful research aimed at the explanation of differentiation. So did everyone else in the Lab.

The apparatus began coming in. As fast as it arrived it was set up in its proper place. Portions of it were tested, pronounced perfect, and connected up to the rest. Panel boards sprung into being. Constant-temperature ovens appeared here and there. Special conveyance facilities connecting with nearby laboratories were built.

IT WAS at a late supper one evening that Marl asked the question the Martins had been waiting for: "What kind of animal shall we make?"

There was no answer. Then Marl spoke. "Suppose we make a dog."

"Good," they said together.

Marl smiled and turned to Ginny.

"What kind of dog would you like?" he asked.

She thought a minute and said, "A collie. I've always wanted a collie but never had time for one."

"All right. What kind of coloring shall we have?"

Ginny looked at Tom. "Tom?"

"White," said Tom. "White, with a smooth coat."

"So be it," said Marl, pushing back his chair. "Let's go and select the genes."

It took him five days to pick out the 14,829 genes that made up the 22 chromosomes. Then the real work began.

Everybody connected with the project lost weight even though the dieticians saw to

it that their nourishment was more than adequate. Massive vitamin dosages helped keep up the health of the workers despite the gruelling pace. Sleep and exercise schedules were rigidly enforced. The work never stopped now. Day and night it went on.

Timing was all-important. Each reaction could take place only in a certain sequence. A break anywhere would have spoiled the entire chain. But it was bound to be successful from the very beginning. Nothing could go wrong. Not with Marl there.

The man was like one possessed. He seemed to carry every detail of the process in his mind. He overlooked nothing; he forgot nothing. Time after time when the possibilities of a snarl materialized he stepped in and smoothed it out as easily as if he were blowing his nose.

The cell swiftly took shape under his skillful manipulation backed by the combined efforts of 452 specialists.

The delicate chromosomes were finished in a week; the entire nucleus in another two weeks. And at the end of the month the finished cell was gently deposited in the growth jar. Nothing remained but to feed it, and that was comparatively easy. The entire Laboratory kind of settled back on its haunches and took a deep breath. It had been rough going even for the Rugmon workers.

The cell's progress was carefully watched by means of cold light and Telecast. Normal light was kept away; the cell's energy balance was too delicate.

A WEEK went by and the cell grew beautifully into a recognizable foetus. The composition of the nurturing solution was slowly modified to meet its changing demands. The pumps kept the rich solutions ever flowing; thermocouples held the temperature within the narrow range. Conditions were such that the normal gestation period was shortened by almost half. And exactly five weeks after he was put into the growth jar little Adam was lifted out.

He was a fine-looking pup, normal in every respect. Tom broke the umbilical cord and gently sponged him down. A snug incubator stood nearby to serve as Adam's first home. A whimsical painter had apparently put the finishing touches on it; just above the central knobs there was lettered in block letters of gold —EDEN.

"Lucky fellow," said Tom as he gave Adam his first feeding of synthesized dog milk. "He has no Eve to cope with."

"I know," said Ginny, "but maybe he'll turn out all right anyway."

Just then a messenger came in. There was to be a meeting of the Number Ones tomorrow. Marl was asked to be there.

Such a meeting was rare. Informal meetings where specialists sought each others' knowledge were commonplace. But a formal meeting of Number Ones was different. Only a discussion of major policy could warrant such a thing.

When Marl walked into the conference room the next morning the others were already there. Cohen was telling them about an incident the night before between his little grand-daughter and her prize doll; everybody was chuckling.

They greeted Marl and as soon as he was seated Lancing began talking to him on behalf of the group:

"Doctor Marl, your researches have been stupendous. All of us are overwhelmed."

"Unbelievable," said Cohen. "You have advanced science by at least a hundred and fifty years."

Marl nodded.

Sternwood spoke: "There's no limitation, is there? You could synthesize any animal you wanted?"

Marl nodded.

"Even man?"

Marl nodded.

SILENCE fell, each man deep in his own thoughts. Stuml began musing, half-aloud, mostly to himself.

"It's too soon. It'll be too upsetting. We shouldn't have to face it yet. I'm afraid of its effects."

He subsided.

Silence.

Marl leaned forward. "Hasn't it always been man's goal to create life? Hasn't he always strived to explain himself? Hasn't he always wanted to be the all in all on earth? Well, here it is. We have reduced him and everything else that lives to chemical equations. Man can now create himself, and his food, and everything he needs. Isn't that what you want?"

The others looked at him, then:

"I don't think so," said Lancing. "You see, hunger has practically disappeared from the earth. For the first time people are beginning to trust

each other. Faith has come back. We're happy, and we work hard for our happiness. We do things. We solve our problems as they come up; we make up new problems and solve those. But this creation—this miracle—it would destroy the people's confidence in themselves. At least now. In time to come when we are ready, then, then this creation will have its place. But not now, not yet. We don't need such tremendous power."

He stopped, and took a deep breath, and went on.

"So gentlemen, I recommend that for the first time we withhold scientific information from the world. I recommend that we bury this knowledge, bury it deep, until the time comes to release it."

Lancing looked at Cohen.

"I agree."

He looked at Stuml.

"I agree."

At Sternwood.

"I agree."

Then all four swung around and looked at Marl.

He met each pair of eyes in turn, looking deep, searching. He pushed his chair back and stood up and faced them. A slow smile spread over his face, and he said.

"I agree."

He turned around and went out the door.

They never saw him again.

THE agent strode into the great domed chamber.

"Good," said the Mesos. "That was a quick check-up. How is everything?"

The agent didn't answer. He seemed lost in his own thoughts. It was one of the rare times in his existence when his thoughts were somewhere else. He was seeing a puppy, a white collie puppy frisking around in front of a tubby baby that gurgled and drooled all over himself. He chuckled.

"Snap out of it, Té," said the Mesos. "How is everything? Do we drown them out?"

The agent shook himself.

"They've come a long way in 2,000 years," he said. "They'll make it."

MEET PAUL ORBAN

Paul Orban is a pleasant, soft-spoken man with a deep enthusiasm for the difficult job of visualizing the vague descriptions of writers. At fourteen he received five dollars for two weeks' work on a water color and decided such "easy" money was for him! He attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, then joined the staff of the Chicago *Tribune*, where he illustrated the "Fu-Manchu" stories. Later became art director for an advertising agency, then decided to move to New York and free-lance. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, book-jackets for the current *Winston Science Fiction Series*, etc. Has covered the whole pulp field, but prefers science fiction because it gives free reign to his imagination and a chance to experiment with techniques. After illustrating Cleve Cartmill's "Deadline," he was quizzed at length by Military Intelligence, who wanted to know whether he even knew anyone working with blueprints. After Hiroshima, he discovered that he had illustrated the first story ever to give an accurate description of the atom bomb.